

BATTLE FOR THE PUNCHBOWL: THE U. S. FIRST MARINE DIVISION'S
1951 FALL OFFENSIVE OF THE KOREAN WAR

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This study is an operational and tactical study of a battle fought by the U. S. 1st Marine Division near “the Punchbowl,” an extinct volcano of military value in the Taebaek Mountains of Korea, from late August through mid September 1951. That engagement was to be the *last* 1st Marine Division offensive of the Korean War. This battle, for Yoke and Kanmubong Ridges, has received little coverage from historians. That it is all but forgotten is surprising, since it was one of the hardest fought for United States Marines in the war. The casualties were high, and Americans did not understand why so many had to die for a war that seemed to already be set to conclude by negotiations. This study tells the story of that battle more completely than ever before, and assesses its significance to the course of the Korean War.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1 st MAW	First Marine Air Wing
AF	Air Force
AGOS	Air Ground Operation System
AT	Anti-Tank
BCT	Battalion Combat Teams
BLT	Battalion Landing Teams
CAS	Close Air Support
CCF	Chinese Communist Forces
CINCFEC	Commander in Chief Far East Command
CINCUNC	Commander in Chief United Nations Command
CO	Commanding Officer
COMNAVFE	Commander Naval Forces Far East
DI	Drill Instructor
DOD	Department of Defense
DUKW	Amphibious Truck
EUSAK	Eighth U.S. Army in Korea
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAF	Fifth Air Force
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FMFLant	Fleet Marine Force Atlantic
FMFPac	Fleet Marine Force Pacific
FO	Forward Observer
FSCC	Fire Support Coordination Centers
H&S	Headquarters and Service
HE	High Explosive
ID	Infantry Division
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JOC	Joint Operations Center
KATSUA	Korean Augmentation to the U.S. Army
KIA	Killed In Action
KMC	Korean Marine Corps
LMG	Light Machine Gun
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group
MAGTF	Marine Air Ground Task Force
MAW	Marine Air Wing
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MLR	Main Line of Resistance
NGF	Naval Gunfire
NKPA	North Korean People's Army
OpnO	Operation Order
RCT	Regimental Combat Teams


RLT	Regimental Landing Teams
ROK	Republic of Korea Troops
SAC	Supporting Arms Center
TACC	Tactical Air Control Center
TACP	Tactical Air Control Party
TAC	Tactical Air Controller
TADC	Tactical Air Direction Center
WIA	Wounded In Action
WP	White Phosphorous

GUIDE TO MAP SYMBOLS

The following few pages are excerpted from the U. S. Army Field Manual (FM 21-25), *Basic Map Reading*, published by the U. S. War Department in April of 1941. The excerpt will help the reader unfamiliar with military map symbols interpret the maps in this study.

■ **7. MILITARY SYMBOLS.**—Conventional signs indicate various types of terrain features. Military symbols have been developed to represent various types of military organizations, activities, and installations. FM 21-30 lists various standardized military symbols. Figure 4 shows some of those most frequently used. These symbols are used to indicate size and identity of various units and installations, type and location of supporting weapons, and necessary lines and boundaries for an operation. A material saving of time in giving orders for military operations may be achieved by using military symbols to outline operations on a map or a map substitute.



1. *To indicate purpose or character of activity.*

Military post or station; command post or headquarters... 


(Lower end of staff or symbol will terminate at point of establishment represented.)


Troop unit..... 

(On large scale maps where troop units can be shown to scale, this symbol may be modified so as to show area occupied by units in column or line, thus:

Line  Column .)

Observation post..... 

Dump, park, or distributing point (temporary depot in combat zone)..... 

Supply train or transportation unit..... 

2. *To indicate arm or service or activity of arm or service.*—These symbols will be placed generally within the symbols shown in 1 above.

Air Corps..... 

Armored Force..... 

FIGURE 4.—Special military symbols.

7 ELEMENTARY MAP AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH READING

Artillery	●
Cavalry	/
Chemical Warfare Service	G
Engineers	E
Infantry (except military police)	X
Military police	MP
Medical Department	+
Ordnance Department	U
Ammunition only	Ⓔ
Prisoners of war	PW
Quartermaster Corps	Q
Class I supplies	Ⓒ
Gasoline and oil only	Ⓓ
Signal Corps	S
3. <i>To indicate size of units.</i> —These symbols will be placed above the symbols shown in 1 above, or used for indicating boundaries as shown in 4 below.	
Squad
Section
Platoon
Company, troop, battery, or Air Corps flight	I
Battalion, cavalry squadron, or Air Corps squadron	II
Regiment or Air Corps group	III
Brigade or Air Corps wing	X
Division	XX
Corps	XXX
Army	XXXX


FIGURE 4.—Special military symbols—Continued.


General headquarters..... GHQ

4. *To indicate boundaries.*


Squad..... 


Section..... 

Platoon..... 

Company or similar unit..... 


Battalion or similar unit..... 


Regiment or similar unit..... 

Brigade..... 

Division..... 


Front line..... 


Limit of wheeled traffic by day..... 


Limit of wheeled traffic by night..... 

5. *Miscellaneous.*

Area, gassed, to be avoided..... 

Automatic rifle..... 

(Dotted when emplacement is not occupied, thus) 

Machine gun..... 

(Arrow to point in principal direction of fire. When used alone it indicates machine gun, water-cooled, cal. .30.)

Machine-gun symbol under symbol of unit of any arm indicates machine-gun unit of that arm.

Caliber .50 (antitank)..... 
















Gun.....		} Open when emplacement is unoccupied, thus.....	} 	
Gun bat- tery.....				
Howitzer or mortar.....				

FIGURE 4.—Special military symbols—Continued.

7 ELEMENTARY MAP AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH READING

37-mm gun.....		37-mm
(AT or AA to be added where applicable.)		
81-mm mortar.....		81-mm
Machine gun (single gun).....		
(Arrows to indicate sectors of fire, shaded portion to show danger space when fire is placed in final protective line.)		
Machine-gun section (two guns).....		
Message center.....		
Tank trap.....		
Traffic:		
One-way.....		
Two-way.....		
Trench for one squad.....		
(For each additional squad add one traverse.)		

6. *Application of special symbols.*














Light Machine-Gun Platoon, Troop A, 2d Cavalry.....		2
Machine-Gun Troop, Caliber .50, 2d Cavalry.....		2
Troop F, 2d Cavalry.....		2
Company A, 2d Engineers (combat).....		2
Battery F, 2d Field Artillery.....		2
One squad, Company A, 4th Infantry.....		4
Light Machine-Gun Section, Company A, 2d Infantry..		2
1st Platoon, Company B, 2d Infantry.....		2
Machine-Gun Platoon, Caliber .50, Company H, 29th Infantry.....		29
Headquarters Company, 3d Infantry.....		3
Company D, 20th Infantry.....		20
Command Post, 3d Battalion, 4th Infantry.....		4
Observation Post, 6th Infantry.....		6

FIGURE 4.—Special military symbols—Continued.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Korean War has been called “the forgotten war.” Of this forgotten war, some periods are more forgotten than others. Among those least studied is anything (besides the peace talks and the POW riots) that took place after the Truman-MacArthur controversy, in other words, from mid 1951 through the end of the war. One portion of this phase in particular has received scant attention, the Fall Offensive of 1951, which included a noteworthy engagement that is all but unknown despite the fierce intensity of the combat involved. That engagement was the battle of the 1st Marine Division (1st Mar Div) for the ridges north of the Punchbowl in late August through mid September 1951, sometimes called the “Punchbowl Offensive” by the Navy /Marine Corps. The “Punchbowl” is a bowl-shaped, extinct volcano ringed by mountains of the Taebaek range in Korea (see map # 2).¹

This study is an operational and tactical study of a Marine Corps battle in the fourth phase of the Korean War, which was part of the Fall Offensive, a series of battles and campaigns that facilitated the Eighth Army’s strategic objective of preserving South Korea by establishing a defensive line across the peninsula (see maps # 3 and 4). This line was to be on defensible enough terrain that UNC forces could repulse any Communist attacks and maintain their positions until a negotiated settlement to end the war could be reached. The decision to end the war through negotiations rather than military force had already been made months before by Washington under the Truman

¹ Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War* (New York: Times Books, 1987); U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report, May-December, 1951” (National Archives, RG 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps): 9-14.

Administration. Eighth Army was carrying out “Limited Objective Attacks,” not to break the enemy’s lines and force his overall surrender in Korea or to secure the whole of the Peninsula to the Yalu River, but to establish its final defensive line on the most defensible terrain available in the vicinity of where its lines lay when negotiations began in July 1951. The UNC had been given the mission to take the strategic defensive. Now it was facilitating that decision from Washington by making an operational and tactical offensive, what Van Fleet called an “active defense.”²

The fighting of late summer and fall, 1951, was bitter. Morale in EUSAK (Eighth U. S. Army Korea) was hurt by the seemingly pointless peace talks, and the fighting for the ridges around the Punchbowl was particularly tough on morale due to high casualties. The most infamous engagements in that area were Bloody Ridge and Heartbreak Ridge in the sector of the 2nd Infantry Division. Such battles seemed to many at home in the United States to be a pointless waste of lives.³

The fighting . . . [in the area of the Punchbowl] was perhaps the bloodiest to date and the most strenuous, demanding the utmost in physical strength, endurance and raw courage. Infantrymen fought like Indians, crawling up hillsides, lugging mortar rounds as well as their own rifles and ammunition and sometimes having to blast the enemy out of dug-in positions at point-blank range.

² Burton I. Kaufman, *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997): Chapter Five, “Negotiations;” Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967): 187. There are three basic levels of war, strategic, operational, and tactical. The first deals with the ends of the war, its objectives as dictated by policy; the second, with how the ends of strategy are to be achieved in a given theatre; and the third, with how the separate battles can fulfill the concerted direction of operations. For more information see: Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory*, (North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 2001): 5-7. The first phase of the Korean War was from the NK (North Korean) attack, June, 25, 1950 through September 15, 1950. The second phase was from September 15, 1950, the date of the Inchon landing, through the intervention by the CCF (Communist Chinese Forces) in November 1950. The third phase extended from then until the retreat of UN forces ended an they once more resumed the offensive. The fourth phase lasted from then until the end of major offensive movements. The fifth phase was the longest, consisting of the time of stalemate from Fall, 1951 through the end of the war, July 27, 1953.

³ Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 950; Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 190; Arned L. Hinshaw, *Heartbreak Ridge: Korea, 1951* (New York: Praeger, 1989): 23; Lynn Montross, Major Hubard D. Kuokka, USMC, and Major Norman W. Hicks, USMC, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953: Volume IV, The East-Central Front*, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3, HQMC, 1962): 199.

The enemy worked with Oriental doggedness to fortify himself in the hills, sometimes tunneling, with hand labor, from the reverse slope of a hill, so that he could pull out of his forward positions under air and artillery attack and find shelter on the reverse slope of a hill, where it was difficult to zero in on him with airstrikes or heavy howitzers. He might build tunnels as much as a thousand yards long to enable him to take quick shelter from bombardment, yet move forward to meet an attack on the ground. The forward ends of these tunnels were usually camouflaged with great skill and care, and it took sharp observation to spot them. Once spotted, however, they could be knocked out with direct hits from our howitzers sighting directly at their targets. [This was using the piece like a rifle in flat trajectory fire and, in harsh terrain, was only possible in certain instances.] Our artillerymen demonstrated some pinpoint accuracy in blasting out these strong points with 8-inch howitzers that had been hauled into position by bulldozers—a novel and effective use for the invaluable weapons.⁴

The assessment that this was wasted effort, touted at the time by many in the press in the U. S. and in Washington, needs reexamination. To date, the standard assessment of the Fall Offensive of 1951 is that the large number of casualties incurred by U. S. troops convinced General Matthew B. Ridgway, CINUNC (Commander in Chief United Nations Command), and LtGen James Van Fleet, commander of EUSAK, to stop all offensives greater than battalion in size and concentrate on defending the territory already taken -- waiting for an armistice. This assessment is true, but Ridgway also believed that one reason the Communists returned to negotiating after walking out of the peace talks in late August, 1951, was these battles. They convinced the Communists to “get back to the negotiating table.” This result of the offensive is one that is often overlooked and should be reemphasized in the historiography of this campaign.⁵

In addition, many histories treat the end of the “war of movement” as coinciding with the initiation of the truce-talks at Kaesong. This is a mistake. Though there was a

⁴ Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 187.

⁵ Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 188-91; Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 948; Lynn Montross, et al., *The East-Central Front*, 199-201; Arned Hinshaw, *Heartbreak Ridge*, 127.

pause, the true end of the “movement” was not until the Fall Offensive ended. It was only after this that the peace-talks resumed and the commanders of EUSAK and UNC decided to halt all offensives except raids.⁶

Although all the battles of this period have received little attention and are in need of further examination, the battle of the 1st Mar Div for Yoke and Kanmubong Ridges has received even less study. The Army fight for Heartbreak and Bloody Ridges to the east obscured it at the time, and in the handful of secondary works that describe the period with any detail beyond a paragraph or two, the fight of the Marines is seldom even mentioned. One of the only books on a battle of the campaign, Arned L. Hinshaw, *Heartbreak Ridge: Korea, 1951* (New York: Praeger, 1989), only obliquely refers to it as “tidying up” in September and does not even mention the Marines in 1951 at all. But the battles of the entirety of X Corps (as well as Operation Commando to the west) had some significance to the course and outcome of the Korean War. And while the 1st Mar Div’s fight was but a single part of the larger effort, it needs thorough assessment because of its importance to American military history, Marine Corps history, EUSAK history, X Corps history, and as a beginning to a better understanding of the whole offensive. One can see a whole of any size only by first examining the parts.

The Punchbowl Offensive would be a significant battle in Marine Corps and Korean War history because of the high casualties, even if no other reason existed. In just one day, on September 14 , 1951, the 1st Mar Div suffered 39 killed in action (KIA) and 463 wounded (WIA), and that was with only two of its four regiments engaged. (If one counts the KMC (Korean Marine Corps) Regiment, the bloodiest day for the division

⁶ Arned Hinshaw, *Heartbreak Ridge*, 22; Lynn Montross, et al., *The East-Central Front*, 256; Lee Ballenger, *The Outpost War: U. S. Marines in Korea, Vol. 1: 1952*, (Washington, D. C.: Brassey’s, 2000): 3-4.

in men killed was September 2nd with 52 KIA and 256 WIA.) The total casualties for the battle were 2,416. This breaks down as 5 MIA, 2,080 WIA, and 331 KIA. That is higher than ten percent of the division's total strength (24,000), including elements not even engaged! If one counts only the infantry regiments (each about 4,000 men strong), the units taking the greater part of the fighting and the casualties, the percentage of losses climbs staggeringly to near twenty percent (KMCs included; 594 casualties were taken in the KMC Regiment in September 1951.)⁷

The casualties of the 2nd Infantry Division (ID) at Heartbreak Ridge, a battle longer than one month, were 3,700—597 KIA, 3,064 WIA, and 84 MIA. The 1st Marine Division's actual days of fighting numbered only fourteen, but it suffered a rate that was also shockingly high. This attests to the tenacity of the NKPA (North Korean People's Army) enemy in the Punchbowl sector and the fierceness of the fighting. (There were no Chinese Communist Forces – CCF – in the Marine sector of front at this time.)⁸

To give some perspective, on the first day of the battle of Peleliu in the Central Pacific, on September 15, 1944 (seven years earlier almost to the day), the 1st Mar Div suffered 210 KIA and 901 WIA. (The total Marine casualties for Peleliu were: 6,500 Marines with 1,200 dead.) That was one of the most fiercely contested assault landings of World War II, and that was with *all three* regiments engaged. (Marine losses at Tarawa were also much higher than the Punchbowl battle, 1,000 dead and 2,400 wounded in three days, but of Korean War battles, the fight for the Punchbowl was among the most costly.) The 5th Mar Div on D-day at Iwo Jima lost 189 KIA and 697

⁷ 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary," September 1951, narrative for actions on September 14; *Ibid.*, 31. The fourth regiment was the attached KMC regiment.

⁸ Arned Hinshaw, *Heartbreak Ridge*, 127.

WIA. The Marines' losses, while not as great as in some of the *worst* fighting in the Pacific, were still high by any standard in American 20th Century warfare.⁹

With such a high price paid, one wonders why and how this battle took place, and the results gained. It is also important to remember what the veterans who survived went through, and perhaps most important, what those who did not survive went through.

Very little has been written on this action, but what there is bears mentioning. Some memoirs that briefly mention this battle are Gerald P. Averill's, *Mustang*; A. Andy Andow's, *Letters to Big Jim Regarding Narrul Purigo, Cashinum Iman* (1994); Charles Hughes's *Accordion War: Life and Death in a Marine Rifle Company, Korea, 1951* (2006); and Burton F. Anderson's *We Claim the Title* (1994). Other accounts are a handful of *Marine Corps Gazette* and *Leatherneck* articles (mostly based on the Official History); the Official Marine History itself (Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapters IIX-IX); and the writings of Allan R. Millett in his books, *In Many a Strife* (1994), and *The Drive North* (2001)—a few pages in the former and about twenty pages in the latter.¹⁰

⁹ Jeter A. Isley, and Philip A. Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory, and Its Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1951): 406, 482.

¹⁰ A. Andy Andow, *Letters to Big Jim Regarding Narrul Purigo, Cashinum Iman*, (New York: Vantage, 1994); Allan R. Millett, *The Drive North: U. S. Marines at the Punchbowl* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Marine Corps Historical Center, 2001). The "Official Histories" are histories of U. S. Marine Operations in the Korean War, written with the participation and approval of the Marine Corps. They are: Lynn Montross and Nicholas Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations In Korea, 1950-1953: Volume I*; Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953: Volume II, The Inchon-Seoul Operation* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3, HQMC, 1955); Lynn Montross and Captain Nicholas A. Canzona, based on research by K. Jack Bauer, PhD., *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953: Volume III, The Chosin Reservoir Campaign*, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3, HQMC, 1957); Lynn Montross, Major Hubbard D. Kuokka, USMC, and Major Norman W. Hicks, USMC, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953: Volume IV, The East-Central Front*, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3, HQMC, 1962); Lieutenant Colonel Pat Meid, USMCR, and Major James M. Yingling, USMC, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, 1950-1953: Volume V, Operations in West Korea*, (Washington, D.C.: Historical Division, HQMC, 1972).

Millett's work on the battle is part of the background in *Many a Strife*, his biography of General Gerald C. Thomas, the 1st Mar Div commander for most of 1951. And in *The Drive North*, the battle is covered in a brief narrative and general analysis. *The Drive North* is a commemorative monograph of the Korean War's fiftieth anniversary and briefly details the campaigns of the 1st Mar Div from May 1951 through the end of the year. This work is well done, but it has neither the space nor the purpose to give a definitive, complete, detailed narrative and in-depth analysis of this battle. Its purpose was to survey and describe a broad period of 1st Mar Div activity in Korea as a whole and not focus on one part of that period. No in-depth study of this battle and its individual significance has yet been done.

The official sources are often litanies of dry and "lifeless" facts. For that reason, details that bring the Marine's experience on those bloody Korean hills to life beyond the bare recitation of facts on the page are provided throughout from memoirs or oral interviews of veterans who were there.

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZATION OF THE MARINE CORPS IN THE ERA OF THE KOREAN WAR

Fighting spirit is not primarily the result of a neat organization chart nor of a logical organizational set-up. The former should never be sacrificed to the latter.

--Ferdinand Eberstadt

The 1st Marine Division had . . . [many] strengths, some obvious in its structure and others based on experience and Marine Corps Tradition. . . . the division provided much of its own support: amphibian tractor battalion, armored amphibian (artillery) battalion, combat service group, engineer battalion . . . [etc.]. Except for its engineers and medical personnel, an Army infantry division contained service units at company, rather than battalion strength. This structure and strength gave the 1st Marine Division the advantage of depending on its combat support and combat service support units to provide their own rear-area security or even provide infantry reinforcements, if necessary. The division had proved the soundness of the Corps' [sic] adage of "every Marine a rifleman" during the Chosin Reservoir withdrawal, and it retained this principle. In addition, the division enjoyed unparalleled professionalism in its leadership. Its officers in the rank of first lieutenant and above and its senior noncommissioned officers were World War II veterans; its second lieutenants and young enlisted men, who bore the burden of combat casualties, simply followed the World War II model and their senior leaders

--Allan R. Millett

To understand the Marine Battle for the Punchbowl in September, 1951, one must have basic understanding of Marine Division structure, organization, and characteristics. A key part to understanding the organization of the Marine Corps is the relationship and position of the Marine Corps within the defense establishment. The Marine Corps is a separate service branch within the American armed forces, but it is still within the Department of the Navy and works closely with the Navy. Its operating

forces, the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF), are under the command of the Chief Naval Officer (CNO), the highest officer in the Navy, equivalent to the Army Chief of Staff. He commands all of the Navy's operating forces. (The Commandant of the Marine Corps, however, is not under the CNO. While the CNO had operational control of the FMF, the fighting units of the Marines, the Commandant retained administrative control over the whole Marine Corps.) This status within the Navy Department at the time of Korea was defined by Department of the Navy General Order No. 5. This order established that the Commandant of the Marine Corps was "a naval executive assistant to the Secretary of the Navy," or what is known as a "Command Assistant."¹ (See Chart #1)

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, under the Secretary of the Navy, shall command the United States Marine Corps. He is directly responsible to the Secretary of the Navy for its administration, discipline, internal organization, training requirements, efficiency, readiness, operation of its materiel support system, and for the total performance of the Marine Corps. When performing these functions, the Commandant of the Marine Corps is not a part of the command structure of the Chief of Naval Operations. However, there must be a close cooperative relationship between the Chief of Naval Operations, as the senior military officer of the Department of the Navy, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, who has command responsibility over that organization. The Commandant of the Marine Corps is directly responsible to the Chief of Naval Operations for the organization, training, and readiness of those elements of the operating forces of the Marine Corps assigned to the Operating Forces of the Navy [the FMF]. Such Marine Corps forces, when so assigned, are subject to the command exercised by the Chief of Naval Operations over the Operating Forces of the Navy.

. . . [These] operating forces . . . consist of (1) the Fleet Marine Forces; (2) detachments afloat, that is, Marine complements aboard naval vessels; (3) security forces at shore (field) activities of the naval establishment; and (4) U. S. Marine Corps combat forces not otherwise assigned.²

However, the Commandant's status with the CNO, the Corps's relationship to the Navy, and the Marine Corps's status as a separate service remained cloudy depending

¹ Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, Chapter 4; James Donovan, *The United States Marine Corps* (New York: Praeger, 1967): 81-82; Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 75.

² James Donovan, *U. S. Marine Corps*, 82.

on who the Secretary of the Navy was and who was CNO, until the Douglas-Mansfield Act of 1952 amended the National Security Act to clarify the question in law. Between the passage of the National Security Act of 1947 and the 1952 amendment, the Commandant was often taken to be a subordinate of the CNO, not a coequal, and the Corps itself an appendage of the Navy and not a separate service within the Navy Department (on the assumption that the act had “intended to tri-elementalize the Armed Forces on a three-Service basis, with the Marine Corps merely a specialist branch of the Navy”), though gentlemen’s agreements between a Secretary of the Navy and a Commandant of the Marine Corps had ascertained otherwise.³

Further clarification of the status of the Marine Corps within the Department of the Navy is needed because of the pervasiveness of the misconception that the Corps is part of the Navy. “Side by side with the Navy, the Marine Corps is one of two military services in the Naval Establishment [Department of the Navy], under direct control of the Secretary of the Navy. . . .” And, as Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee during the late 1940s, early 1950s, Carl Vinson said, “The fact is that the Marine Corps is and always has been, since its inception 175 years ago, a separate military service apart from the United States Army, the United States Navy, and the United States Air Force.” The “misconception” that the Marine Corps is an “appendage”

³ Thomas, Heintz, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 73-74; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan, 1980): 506-07. That Secretary of the Navy was John L. Sullivan and the Commandant of the Marine Corps was General A. A. Vandegrift. Sullivan wrote to Vandegrift on 17 December 1947 to say that, “The Commandant of the Marine Corps is informed that it is not the intent of the Navy Department, in seeking enactment of H. R. 3432 [Public Law 432, what would become the National Security Act], to alter the Commandant’s direct responsibility to the Secretary of the Navy for the administration and efficiency of the Marine Corps. The Navy Department interprets neither Executive Order 9635 [an earlier directive defining the wartime position of the Chief of Naval Operations] nor H. R. 3432 as interposing the Chief of Naval Operations in the administrative chain of responsibility between the Secretary and the Commandant, or as otherwise modifying the historical relationship between the Secretary and the Commandant.” (Quotation from the *Officer's Guide*.)

of the Navy was “set at rest with some emphasis in the debate and hearings on Public Law 416, during which Congress avowed that the Marine Corps was not a mere appendage, but a Service in its own right.” But there was more. “As stated in *Navy Regulations* . . . the Naval Establishment embraces all activities committed to the care of the Secretary of the Navy, and thus includes the Marine Corps. This does not make the Marine Corps a part of, but rather a partner of the Navy proper.”⁴

The Fleet Marine Forces themselves are combined arms forces of land, air, and sea components divided into two commands, based on either of the two main coasts of the United States, Atlantic and Pacific. “Each includes a force headquarters, force troops, elements of the service command, divisions and brigades, and wings and groups.” These Fleet Marine Forces are “integrated with the several U.S. fleets,” and, “have the status of a fleet command . . . subject to the operational authority of the respective fleet commanders, except that the conduct of individual –intra-unit training is retained by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, who also retains administrative control.” So while the 1st Mar Div was under the operational control of the Eighth U.S. Army in Korea, this was a departure from the normal operational relationship it would have had as an element of the Operating Forces of the U. S. Navy. (See Charts # 2 and 3) This was done under the clause of the National Security Act giving the Marines the mission of “such other duties as the President may direct,” and tradition wherein Marine Corps elements were attached to Army command in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, World War I, and various operations in World War II, all before the said act was written. Ordinarily or at least, ordinarily under Navy command, the FMF has its operational planning done by “the unified commands through the naval component commands to

⁴ Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 72-73, 74.

which Fleet Marine forces are assigned. Thus, the Fleet Marine forces and the Naval Amphibious forces plan and train together as a team.”⁵

The Fleet Marine Forces were classified as a “*Type Organization*” of the U. S. Fleets. “As its name implies, the type organization is based on types of ships or forces.” An example would be the “type command” of Commander Destroyers, in which all the destroyers in a fleet are grouped. “. . . the Fleet Marine Force is a type command, since it comprises all Marine Corps tactical units – air and ground – assigned to the Fleet.” The FMF is the teeth of the Corps, where the actual fighting forces are.⁶ (See Charts # 4 and 5)

The threefold mission of the Fleet Marine Forces at the time of Korea was: “(1) to serve with the fleets in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign; (2) to develop, as directed by the commandant of the Marine Corps, those phases of amphibious operations pertaining to tactics, technique, and equipment employed by landing forces; and (3) to train a maximum number of personnel to meet the requirements of expansion during time of war.” In any case, the 1st Mar Div was still under the administrative command of FMFPac (and the Commandant of the Marine Corps), whose commander for the greater part of the Korean War (and in September 1951) was LtGen Lemuel Shepherd.⁷

On June 30, 1950, the total strength of the Corps was 74,279 active duty Marines. This total consisted of 40,364 in *Operating Forces*; 24,552 in the *Supporting*

⁵ James Donovan, *U. S. Marine Corps*, 82-83; Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 86, 9, 63, Chapter 5; Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 69-71; James Donovan, *U. S. Marine Corps*, 96.

⁶ Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 63.

⁷ James Donovan, *U. S. Marine Corps*, 83; Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 86.

Establishment; 3,871 in *Special Assignment*; and 5,492 who were hospitalized, imprisoned or otherwise incapacitated. In the *Operating Forces*, the FMF at this time numbered 27,703 men; security detachments 11,087; and 1,574 Marines were on sea-duty. The FMF was divided between FMFPac (Fleet Marine Force Pacific) and FMFLant (Fleet Marine Force Atlantic). FMFPac numbered 11,853; 7,779 of which were in the 1st Mar Div (based in Camp Pendleton, California), and 3,733 of which made up the 1st MAW. The other 15,803 Marines were in FMFLant: 8,973 in the 2nd Mar Div (based in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina), 5,297 in the 2d MAW. Since the wartime strength of a reinforced Mar Div was then from 22-26,000 men, it is obvious that the entire FMF barely had enough numbers to constitute *one* full strength division, much less two (later, the Douglas-Mansfield Act of 1952, which amended the National Security Act, included a third division in the Marine Corps's strength, based in Okinawa). In addition, the Marine Corps had a total of 128,959 reserve Marines (about twice as many as the Marines then on active duty) – a force the Corps relied on, in planning for a war, to expand the peacetime establishment to war strength. By the end of the war, Marines had suffered 26,043 casualties with 4,262 dead, but the Marine Corps's total strength had been rebuilt to a total of 230,488 on active duty.⁸

⁸Lynn Montross, et al., *Marine Operations in Korea Vol. II*, 20-21; James Donovan, *U.S. Marine Corps*, 65. "In basic combat units this pitifully small figure equated to three infantry battalions and three tactical aircraft squadrons on the West Coast and three infantry battalions and four tactical aircraft squadrons on the East Coast. All of these formations, plus units of supporting artillery, engineers, tanks, air control, and supply were gravely understrength. Despite the [Secretary of Defense Louis] Johnson austerities, however, the Marines had managed to attain a respectable state of training. . . . Put in other terms, on 25 June when the North Korean blitz of some 75,000 men drove south across the 38th Parallel, the Marines' existing air/ground expeditionary force was tiny and emaciated. But what there was of it was ready to go. . . . To . . . provide a reinforced regiment and a Marine aircraft group at anything approaching full war strength . . . would take the bulk of the Fleet Marine Force resources on the West Coast. Only bits and pieces would be left of the 1st Marine Division and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Realistically, however, that is what they were there for." – Victor Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the United States Marine Corps* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984): 122-24.

A Marine Division in 1950 numbered approximately 22,000 men. (See Charts # 6 and 7) It was the main unit for infantry combat in the Marine Corps. It was a force of combined arms organized, basically, in triangular fashion (i.e., by threes: three regiments per division, three battalions per regiment, three companies per battalion, three rifle-platoons per company, etc.), however, Marine aviation was not organic to a Marine division, contrary to popular misconception, despite the “inseparable” makeup of the Marine air-ground team (addressed later). More than half of the 20,000 plus men comprised the teeth of the division, the three infantry regiments. In addition, a Marine division included organic artillery (one regiment), “a service regiment, a tank battalion, special teams to control air and naval gunfire support, engineers, shore party, motor transport, medical, signal, and other units normal for a force of combined arms.”⁹

The 1st Mar Div (reinforced) in the Korean War was very big indeed. It was almost “a corps within a corps.” It actually numbered almost 30,000 men in 1951 with the KMC regiment attached.¹⁰

The division was definitely equipped for heavy combat, though its organic motor transport was inadequate for long term land operations far from the sea. A Marine division was no light-weight. Robert D. Heinl included an appendix to his *Victory at High Tide*, entitled, “the Sinews of Battle,” that compared the 1st Mar Div of 1950 during the Inchon/Seoul campaign to the standard Army infantry division. Some excerpts from that appendix are useful here:

Although the *Chromite* operation [Inchon landing] was conducted, at least nominally, under a corps headquarters, it was nonetheless a campaign in which the division, either Marine or infantry, was the dominant fighting organization. In modern warfare, the division is said to be the smallest unit (comparatively

⁹ Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 88.

¹⁰ Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 293, 306.

speaking) which embodies all the combined arms and services required for sustained combat. In 1950 the Marine division at war strength (22,343) was a heavier, stronger division than the infantry division (18,804).

The teeth of a division, as distinct from its administrative and logistic tail, are its three infantry regiments (each of three battalions), its artillery, and its armor. . . . As distinct from the infantry division of the Army, the Marine division of course includes units, equipment and skills of primary importance in amphibious operations. [The shore party battalion is an example.] In 1950 the Marine infantry regiment had a strength of 3,902; the Army regiment numbered 3,774. The Marine infantry battalion (1,123) outnumbered the Army battalion (917) by about 20 per cent.

In artillery the two divisions were exactly comparable: each had one battalion of 18 medium (155mm) howitzers, and three battalions, each equipped with 18 105mm light howitzers. In infantry firepower, however, as shown by the following table, considerable disparity existed between the Marine division and the infantry division.

<i>Weapon</i>	USMC	Army
Carbine	9740	7474
Rifle, M-1	8748	6913
Pistol, .45	3196	2769
BAR	903	412
Shotgun	6	0
Thomson submachine	99	0
Machine gun, water-cooled .30	54	40
Machine gun, air-cooled.30	575	160
Machine gun, .50 cal.	187	354
3.5" Bazooka	376	546
Recoilless rifle, 75mm	12	39
60mm mortar	81	84
81mm mortar	54	40
4.2" mortar	24	36
Flame thrower	111	0

Epitomizing the comparison between the two divisions is the fact that, in 1950, the Marine division, 18 per cent stronger, had 27 per cent more men armed with the basic weapon of infantry combat, the M-1 rifle.

In armor the two divisions were nearly equal, though not numerically so. The Army division had 144 tanks of all types; the Marines had but 100. However, the Army figure included light tanks, whereas the Marine tanks were all medium, except for 9 flame-thrower tanks, of which the Army division had none. Being shaped for sustained land operations, the Army unit's motor transportation (3,800 vehicles) far exceeded that of the Marine division (2,409)¹¹

¹¹ Robert D. Heinl, *Victory At High Tide* (Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company, 1979): 291-92. Used by permission.

Many of these disparities were due to the Marine Corps's experiences in the Pacific in WWII. For instance, the Marines added more machine guns after the battle of Tarawa in 1943. They also had a great many more BARs, organized in a different manner within the squad (this is addressed in detail later on in this chapter) than the Army, and this was also because of the need experienced in the Pacific war for more firepower than previous tables of organization, adopted from Army doctrine, allowed for. Thus, even without reinforcement from non-organic subordinate units, the Marine division is "the largest – and heaviest – infantry-type division in the world."¹²

Furthermore, beyond standard tables of organization, a Marine Division in wartime was usually reinforced with "additional combat support and combat service support elements from force troop units." (Force troops were a pool of combat or combat support units within the FMF not organic to a division or wing, which were there for the purpose of reinforcing a division, brigade, regimental or battalion landing team -- or regimental or battalion combat team.)¹³

The structure of a Marine Division allowed for great flexibility and task grouping, enabling applicability to almost any situation or contingency.

The combat support and combat service support units of the division are organized to permit their attachment to subordinate combat units. Consequently, task groups of combined arms are organized around the infantry regiment or battalion. These task groups are called regimental landing teams (RLT) – or

¹² James Donovan, *United States Marine Corps*, 98, 78.

¹³ James Donovan, *United States Marine Corps*, 98; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 508, 102-03. Though one source claims that force troops did not come about as a concept or organization until 1951, I have found reference to force troops as early as 1948 in Marine war planning. -- Marine Corps Board Report, "Organization of the Fleet Marine Force," (Quantico, VA: NAVMC, National Archives, Record Group 127, 1 December 1948): 4. "Force troops constitute a pool of supplementary and specialized units with which the Fleet Marine Force commander may augment a landing force. Force troops and aviation units are composed of combat support, combat service support, and service troops organized as separate regiments, battalions, companies, batteries, or groups. Typical units found in force troops are communication battalions, heavy artillery units, tank battalions, engineer battalions, service regiments, dental companies, reconnaissance companies, and amphibious tractor battalions."

reinforced regiments – and battalion landing teams (BLT) – or reinforced battalions [when utilized amphibiously, but in Korea, where the division and subordinate task units fought mostly in land campaigns, these were called regimental combat teams (RCT) and battalion combat teams (BCT) like the Army's]. This organization of the Marine division permits flexibility in task groupings for many situations, in place of a fixed organization for all situations.¹⁴

Within a Marine Division were three maneuver elements, the infantry regiments. These were typically employed in the assault or the defense with two forward and one held back as reserve. Below these were the infantry battalions, “the basic tactical unit organized to form a balanced fire and maneuver team.” (See Chart # 8) Again containing a triumvirate of principal subordinate units, the battalion contained three rifle companies (sometimes four), each having three platoons of three rifle squads. Each squad was composed of three fire teams. In addition to the infantry regiments, the Marine division included one regiment of artillery numbering 3,108 men.¹⁵

The *reinforced* regiment (RCT) or Battalion Combat or Landing Team (BCT or BLT respectively) could have various elements attached. Organic to it were three infantry battalions, a headquarters and service company, a weapons battalion, a 4.2 inch mortar company, a communications company, a TACP (Tactical Air Control Party), an anti-tank company, as well as other elements. A Marine regiment without reinforcement numbered 3,902 men (169 officers and 3,733 enlisted). The infantry regiments of the 1st Mar Div in the Korean War were the 1st, 7th, and 5th Marines. Sometimes a Korean Marine Corps (KMC) regiment was also attached to the division. The 1st Mar Div artillery regiment was the 11th Marines.¹⁶

¹⁴ James Donovan, *United States Marine Corps*, 98-99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶ The nine rifle companies in a Marine regiment were designated by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and I, with A, B, and C – called according to the phonetic alphabet Able, Baker, and Charlie – in the first battalion; D, E, and F, -- Dog, Easy, and Fox – in the second battalion; and G, H, and I – George, How,

A typical organization of a Marine infantry battalion (not reinforced), “the basic tactical unit of infantry,” was three rifle companies (228 men each), one weapons company (215 men), and one headquarters and service company (224 men). (See Chart # 8) Within the headquarters and service (H&S) company were: the battalion headquarters, a company headquarters, a communication platoon, a recoilless rifle platoon, a service platoon, an 81mm mortar platoon, a TACP, and a medical platoon. Within the company headquarters inside this “H&S” company was a headquarters section and a flamethrower section with one to four flamethrower squads. Beneath the recoilless rifle platoon were four anti-tank (AT) sections with one to two recoilless rifle squads to them. Inside the 81mm mortar platoon were four 81mm mortar sections that each had a Forward Observer (FO) team and two 81mm squads.¹⁷

Each rifle company in the infantry battalion had within it a headquarters platoon, three rifle platoons, and one weapons platoon. The rifle company numbered 228 men, 7 officers and 221 enlisted. Inside the rifle platoons were three rifle squads consisting of three fire teams each, and a platoon headquarters. Each rifle platoon numbered 44 enlisted and 1 officer. The platoon headquarters consisted of the platoon commander (usually a 2ndLt—for rank abbreviations, see list of abbreviations), a platoon sergeant (Technical Sergeant was the usual rank of this billet), a platoon guide (Staff Sergeant),

and Item – in the third battalion. So, for example, if How Company, 7th Marines is mentioned, one should know that it is in the Third Battalion 7th Marines, or 3/7. A regiment in Marine terminology is referred to in plural and by its number: thus the 1st Marine Regiment is referred to as the “1st Marines.” This terminology will be adhered to hereafter in this work, without the quotation marks.

¹⁷ U.S. Marine Corps, *MCS 3-30, Rifle Platoon Tactics*, NAVMC—7700, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Schools, 1958): 1-2.; U.S. Marine Corps, *NAVMC—4161: PHIB-10, Amphibious Operations: The Battalion Landing Team in the Assault of a Defended Beach* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Schools, 1947): 5; U.S. Marine Corps, *Reference Data: Amphibious Operations*, NAVMC—1048 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1951); U.S. Marine Corps, *NAVMC—4520: PHIB-3, Amphibious Operations: Command and Organization of the Attack Force* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Schools, 1948). The following section is mostly drawn from these manuals.

and three messengers or runners (Pvt). Each of the three rifle squads contained thirteen men organized into three fire teams of four men each and one squad leader. (See chart # 9)

The weapons platoon within the rifle company had three machine gun sections with two machine gun squads each, and a rocket section with three rocket squads each (in the Korean War a “rocket section” was a 3.5 inch bazooka section for anti-tank purposes). The machine gun squads each had one .30 caliber light machine gun (LMG), “a squad leader, a gunner, assistant gunner, and five ammunition carriers for each gun or 16 men per section. Each section is attached [at least in the September fighting] to each of [the] three rifle platoons [in the rifle company] . . .”¹⁸

The Marine Corps rifle squad differed from that of the Army in the Korean War. The Army squad consisted of ten to twelve men organized around one BAR. The Marine Corps, too, organized its squads this way at first. But in World War II, 1943, the Marines needed more firepower in the amphibious landings and on the small unit level in jungle warfare. So they broke the squad down into smaller groups of four men called “fire teams,” each built around a BAR. “The result, first noted in reports on the Marianas, and uniformly in later battles, was a notable gain in the aggressiveness and hitting power of Marine infantry.”¹⁹

Korean War Marine and infantry officer, James Brady, described the fire team concept very well:

¹⁸ Burton F. Anderson, *We Claim the Title* (Aptos, CA: Tracy Publishing, 1994): 90.

¹⁹ Andrew Geer, *The New Breed* (New York: Harper, 1952): 84; James Donovan, *U. S. Marine Corps*, 151-56; Robert D. Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Baltimore: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America): 464; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 406; Isley and Crowl, *Marines and Amphibious War*, 341; 1st Lt L. M. Holmes, “Birth of the Fire Team,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 36:11, November 1952: 16-23.

A Marine rifle platoon in Korea was a superbly balanced tactical unit with enormous firepower and an eminently sensible fundamental premise: in combat no one man can reasonably be expected to control directly and effectively more than three other men. In a firefight, you can't keep tabs on more than three Marines and still be aware of the enemy. A Marine rifle platoon has three squads whose squad leaders are trained to maintain contact with the platoon leader. When he issues orders he issues them not to forty men, but only to these three sergeants. In their turn, they each control three fire teams, each of which is commanded by a corporal fire-team leader. They look to the squad leader for orders, he to them for action. In the fire team the corporal has three men, whom he controls and who look always to him during a firefight.²⁰

This also meant that the Marine platoon had the greatest amount of organic firepower of any U. S. rifle platoon. Brady continued:

Army platoons also have three squads, but the squads aren't broken down into fire teams but remain an unwieldy straggle of ten or a dozen men. There is one other material distinction between Marine and Army rifle platoons: fire power and the Browning Automatic Rifle. The BAR is a wonderfully steady, fast-firing, very accurate weapon. Each Marine fire team is built around the BAR. A Marine platoon had nine BARs, the Army platoon only three, one to each squad.²¹

Marines thought very highly of the BAR, its weight was worth the effort required to haul it around. Said Brady:

The BAR weighed twenty pounds even without ammo, and the ammo belts weighed that much again, yet it seemed that a stunted little guy weighing about 130 pounds was always lugging it. At Quantico we bitched about being chosen as BAR men during field problems. Out here you couldn't pry one away from a BAR man. It was the finest one-man weapon employed in the infantry, a great weapon. It had a range with a certain type of ball cartridge of 5,500 yards—more than three miles. BAR men were forever arguing over that, whether you could hit a man at three miles, or if at that distance he had disappeared below the curvature of the earth and you couldn't even see him. Marines delighted in intellectual debates like that, loud and obscene.²²

The amount of firepower in the fire team concept and the BAR gave Marine squads a distinct tactical advantage on the small-unit level over enemies and allies alike. It also gave the Marine platoon commander and particularly the NCOs, a great

²⁰ James Brady, *The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 1990): 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

deal more influence on the battlefield. "In a fire fight, the fire team leader is the 'general' of three men and twenty yards of front." This was a principle of decentralization of control. "Because of its great firepower, the BAR was the most vital weapon of the platoon and every man had to know that weapon as well as his own M1 rifle. The basic philosophy was that any member of the platoon could take over as BARman if necessary." There were other benefits as well. "The reorganized squad was also easier to organize for assaulting fortified positions," such as the Marines assaulted in the Punchbowl Offensive.²³

Brady went on from a very "Marine" perspective:

But those nine automatic rifles gave young Marine officers like . . . me one of our two big advantages over our Army counterparts. We had more firepower. The other advantage was the Marine rifle platoon's organization, easier to command in a firefight, when even the coolest of men can become confused. Add to this the fact that Marines, enlisted Marines, take orders without question, and you understand why it is simpler to command troops as a Marine officer and that it has little to do with courage or brains. Marines are no better or worse than soldiers as men. What the Marine has is better training, a more maneuverable unit, more actual firing practice, often better noncommissioned officers, and an intangible spirit founded on tradition.

He also had more BARs, which may be more important than anything else.²⁴

An example to give perspective on the amount of firepower this gave a Marine division is that the 5th Marines alone in 1951, had eighty-one rifle squads. (The Marine Corps had a policy of keeping its division in Korea at full strength). With the other two infantry RCTs, that would make 243 rifle squads in the full-strength 1st Marine Division.

This is one area where the Marines were not forced to conform to the rest of Eighth Army in the fighting for the Punchbowl in 1951. Thus the Marine had advantage

²³ Andrew Geer, *New Breed*, 84; Burton Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 228; Allan Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 406.

²⁴ James Brady, *Coldest War*, 80-81.

over the standard Army infantry division besides just those of numbers. However, one point of note about soldiers in the Korean War was that they were deprived of the same quality of overall manpower by the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to the U. S. Army) program. Koreans were integrated with the American soldiers, and because of the language and cultural problem, the development of effective cohesion or sound primary groups was hindered severely.²⁵

It is thus unfair to compare the Army in Korea with the Marines, particularly before Ridgway took command. This is because of KATUSA, comparative lack of pre-war training, and the formidable morale problem brought on by the first few months' experiences and defeats. Furthermore, due to Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson and the new emphasis on the Air Force and Nuclear weapons before 1950, the Army was cut very drastically on the eve of Korea. It took time to build back up. A smaller service that had always been cadre based and very familial like the Corps could do so much easier than could the larger Army.

Also, the USMC had *one* division and placed many of its best men therein; the Army had many divisions and had to spread its best men out more. Furthermore, the Marines didn't have Europe and other major commitments around the globe to pull away good men. The Marines in Korea were at the best they had ever been—highly salted with the cream of the crop of WWII veterans. The Army, in general, though certain individual units were exemplary, was at a low ebb (before Ridgway came in at least – though after the stalemate began, the rotation system, the KATUSA program, and other factors led the quality of manpower in Army ranks to decline), and it is unfair,

²⁵ Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 507; Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 294.

if one must insist on making any kind of comparison, to compare one case at its best to one that was not.²⁶

Marines in the Korean War (and today) did not have their own medical personnel as did the Army and the Navy. The Navy supplied its medical services. A Navy medical battalion was often found in a Marine division and two “Corpsmen” (the equivalent of a medic in the Army) were attached to each platoon in a company. The Corpsmen tended wounded on the front lines and tried to stabilize them with first-aid for transport to the rear. The next stop was a forward aid station and then the Battalion Aid station. From there, Navy or Army field hospitals “performed necessary surgery. . . . The more seriously wounded were transported to Japan and, when recovered sufficiently, sent home to the states or back to Korea.”²⁷

Marine air was the other half of the Marine fighting team. The purpose of the organization of the air segment of the Marine Corps is closely tied conceptually to what Marines called the “air-ground team concept.” Together, the Marine air and ground segments were intended to work together according to it. Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton described it thusly in the *Marine Officer’s Guide*:

The role of Marine Corps aviation in *the air-ground team* is to support Fleet Marine operations by close and general tactical air support, and air defense. Secondary to this main job, Marine aviation may be called on to provide replacement or augmentation squadrons for duty with the fleet air arm.

The noteworthy characteristic of Marine aviation is that it forms an inseparable part of the combined arms team with which the Corps backs up its infantry. . . . The kind of close air support that Marines are accustomed to demands complete integration between air and ground. Pilot and platoon leader

²⁶ S.L.A. Marshall, *Pork Chop Hill* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1956. Reprint. 1986): 2, 5, 37; Spencer C. Tucker, *Encyclopedia of the Korean War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. 3 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2000): entry for “Korean Augmentation to the United States Army.”

²⁷ Burton Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 187; Henry Berry, *Hey, Mac, Where Ya Been?: Living Memories of the U. S. Marines in the Korean War* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988): 108; Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer’s Guide*, 55-56; Martin Russ, *The Last Parallel: A Marine’s War Journal* (New York: Rinehart, 1957): 120.

wear the same color uniform, share the same traditions and common fund of experience, and go to school side by side in Quantico.²⁸

James Donovan adds some background to this concept: “The air-ground team concept is predicated on amphibious assault operations conducted largely by Navy-Marine amphibious forces in the seizure and defense of advanced naval bases, somewhat in the pattern of the Central Pacific in World War II. . . .” He also supplies some description, “The theory of the balanced air-ground team organization as a ready, mobile, flexible, and well coordinated weapons system is particularly applicable to small-scale contingencies within the logical scope of naval task force capabilities.”²⁹

Marine air was organized to provide supporting air to Marine ground forces in amphibious operations, but was intended to provide the same support to FMF forces in ground operations as well. A Marine aircraft wing, “contains the necessary personnel, aircraft, air defense and control equipment, and logistic services for the support of a Marine division.” (See Chart # 10) It usually numbered about 12,000, and, where a Marine Division consisted of three regiments, was made up of three Marine Aircraft Groups (MAG). Each MAG consisted of at least two squadrons.³⁰

It was organized for expeditionary amphibious operations. “Marine Corps combat aviation is organized, trained, and equipped as a completely expeditionary air arm. It is this implicit expeditionary aspect that sets Marine Corps aviation apart from other aviation organizations. It is prepared to operate, after rapid establishment ashore, from minimal airfields within the objective area during the assault phase of an amphibious

²⁸ Thomas, Heintz, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 97-98.

²⁹ James Donovan, *United States Marine Corps*, 106-07

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

operation. It is also capable of operating from aircraft carriers in support of an amphibious operation.”³¹

However, unlike Marine divisions, Marine wings and groups “are not organized according to tables of organization, but are task-organized to accomplish the missions assigned. . . . Squadrons and battalions within a wing do, however, have tables of organization.”³²

A typical wing in the era of the Korean War was composed as follows: three fighter/attack MAGs that each contained two fighting squadrons, one night fighter squadron, one attack squadron, one air base squadron, and one HQ and maintenance squadron. Another MAG was organized for transport. In addition, the wing contained a Marine Wing service group; another HQ squadron with a composite squadron, a photographic squadron, and an observation squadron underneath it; a Marine air control group; and a MAG (helicopter) with a HQ and maintenance squadron, an air base squadron, and three helicopter transport squadrons underneath it. Again, the principal task of the Marine air wing was to provide air support to the infantry of a Marine division.³³

From the preceding, the reader should have a basic understanding of the organization of the Marine Corps fighting arms and especially a Marine Division. This understanding is essential to be able to follow the narrative of the Punchbowl Offensive.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 101.

³³ Thomas, Heinl, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*, 89.

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY OF MARINE OPERATIONS, JANUARY-AUGUST, 1951

The events of that time might well be called the “Forgotten Campaigns” of what is now often termed the “Forgotten War.”

—*Ronald J. Brown*

To give the reader perspective, it is necessary to summarize the interim period between the Hungnam evacuation in late December, 1950 and the Fall Offensive of 1951.

After taking time out to recover from the losses of the Chosin Reservoir campaign, 1st Mar Div spent early 1951 involved in an anti-guerilla operation, called the “Pohang guerilla hunt” by the Marines, in the vicinity of Pohang on the east coast of Korea about one hundred miles south of the 38th parallel. This operation was well behind UN lines and the goal was to root out guerillas hiding in the hills in order to protect the Eighth Army supply line. Here MajGen O. P. Smith, still commanding the division, executed anti-guerilla operations strictly in accordance with Marine “small wars” doctrine.¹ (See Map # 5)

After weeks of patrolling after guerillas, the Marines saddled up for General Ridgway’s Operation Killer in mid February. They moved to the central front of Korea near Wonju, and attacked north to Hoensong about eight miles away. After combat in the hills above this town and four hundred Marine casualties to 2,000 for the enemy, the Marines participated in Operation Ripper in March. Here, 1st Mar Div again attacked

¹ Most of the summary of the operations leading up to the battles of August and September is drawn from the following sources: U.S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report”; Ronald Brown, *Counteroffensive*; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 1-37; and Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, chapter 23.

north, this time to phase line Cairo about twenty miles away. Operation Ripper ended 29 March in the Marine zone of action, with all the division's objectives in hand. These two operations cost the division 958 casualties to 7,000 estimated for the enemy.² (See Maps # 6, 7, and 8)

Through April, the division then participated in operations Rugged and Dauntless where it advanced another twenty miles to Hwachon near the Hwachon Reservoir. Intelligence sources correctly told Eighth Army another major Chinese offensive, the "CCF Fifth Phase Offensive" was brewing, and it broke 22 April before the final objectives of Dauntless had been reached.³ (See Map # 9)

In the actions that followed, the Marines encountered some of their toughest fighting of the war in holding the eastern flank of a salient that developed in IX Corps (the Army corps the division was a part of at the time) lines when the 6th ROK Division, stationed on the Marines' left, dissolved under Chinese pressure. The Marines held and could have continued to hold in their opinion, (anything that looks like a retreat is disgruntling to a Marine) but the IX Corps commander, disagreed and had them pull back to even out Eighth Army lines and avoid a situation where the CCF could penetrate deeply south of 1st Mar Div and then cut east in its rear, effectively cutting off its support and possibly surrounding it.⁴ (See Map # 9)

The Marines fell back by phase lines in good order, with some complex but smoothly executed maneuvers that brought 1st Mar Div south and east to the zone of X Corps. Thus the Marines were detached from IX Corps by order of Lt Gen James Van

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Fleet, commander of Eighth Army, and put into X Corps, the same corps it had served under from Inchon to the Chosin Reservoir to the withdrawal from Hungnam.⁵

In order to complete this transfer, Van Fleet could not have General Smith continue to command 1st Mar Div because of enmity over operations in 1950 between Smith and MajGen Edward Almond, X Corps's commander. Ridgway had promised Smith he would not have to serve under Almond again. And so MajGen Gerald C. Thomas came to command 1st Mar Div in late April while the division was still engaged in withdrawal operations to the No Name Line.⁶ (See Map # 9)

Smith had been no slouch as a commander, but Thomas had attended the Army's Command and General Staff College and also got along well with many important Army officers. He had been G-3 (operations officer) on MajGen A. A. Vandergrift's staff during the battle of Guadalcanal, making him an insider of the Guadalcanal clique prominent in Marine leadership after World War II and no stranger to the "Old Breed," as the 1st Mar Div was called in that war. He proved to be a stalwart commander who followed the Marine combat ideal of leading as close to the sound of the guns as possible. Energetic, he frequently traveled about the division and corps area by helicopter (a necessity in the harsh terrain), and rather than planting himself at his headquarters, spent much of his time visiting the subordinate units of his division.⁷

On the No Name Line, 1st Mar Div again found combat when CCF attacked the 7th Marines guarding a key pass on the road from Hongchon to Chunchon as a forward "patrol base," a concept Marines disdained. "The patrol base idea was a new Army idea.

⁵ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 1-37; Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, chapter 23; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

It sure wasn't in the field service regulations, and they sure as hell didn't teach it when I was at Leavenworth [Command and General Staff College], and I didn't like it." This was the second phase of the Fifth Chinese Offensive. The battle to hold Morae Kogae Pass began on the night of 16 May 1951 and lasted all night (part of the larger battle of the Soyang River, 16-21 May). The Marine slew 112 Chinese and captured 82 in the fight. The enemy had been mowed down in droves.⁸ (See Map # 10)

General Thomas had disliked having one regiment out of mutual reinforcement distance from the rest and took the opportunity of this attack to pull the 7th Marines back to the No Name Line with the rest of the division. Then X Corps had the division shift some of its units east to relieve the 9th Infantry, USA, part of the 2nd Infantry Division, and south to strengthen the Marines' defensive posture. Thus the division had curved its right flank towards the south above Hongchon. The division held here, and on 20 May, a single battalion of the 5th Marines blistered a probe by CCF with its supporting arms, resulting in 170 enemy dead. "The withdrawal and our rapid movement there had given me confidence in what the division could do. It revealed the division, as I said a while ago, as a real pro outfit. I doubt if there was a better outfit ever walked than the 1st Marine Division on the 24th of April, 1951."⁹

IX Corps, to the left of X Corps on the line, received orders to mount a counteroffensive while X Corps held steady, and the Marines were charged with

⁸ Thomas said of the concept when asked his opinion of it in an interview: "Phony as a three dollar bill. It is an invitation to disaster. The Army lost a lot of people in Korea because it got a lot of small units scattered and isolated – failed to concentrate. A Marine infantry regiment could cut its way out of any encirclement; a Marine battalion would be safe, even if encircled, provided other forces were ready to go promptly to their relief." – Interview with Gerald C. Thomas by Col C. W. Harrison, no date, located in the front of the Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, page 2-3; Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir -- a leather bound transcript of MajGen Tomas's "Career Interview," conducted by Benis M. Frank, 1966, (Washington Navy Yard, U. S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Oral History Section): 742.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 748.

defending the left flank of X Corps on the line between it and IX Corps, as IX Corps advanced. The Chinese offensive had shot its bolt, leaving EUSAK a great chance to crush the CCF in Korea.¹⁰

The offensive did not move quickly enough to satisfy Van Fleet or Ridgway, so X Corps was added to the assault on 23 May in a move to cut across the base of a CCF salient before the Chinese could withdraw. The plan didn't work, however, because X Corps moved too slow and the Chinese withdrew too fast. Thus X Corps would continue the attack to the north. The 1st Mar Div drove north with its corps toward Yangu on the east end of the Hwachon Reservoir during this offensive and reached it on 31 May. Here was Line Topeka, and the Marines occupied a zone along it.¹¹ (See Map #11)

In this advance the Marine utilized their preference of using ample supporting arms to trade steel for lives, inflicting harsh punishment on the enemy while suffering little for itself. The estimates of enemy losses were 10,000. The Marines actually counted 1,870 dead and took almost 600 prisoners. Most of the killing was effected by artillery. The division's own casualties numbered 83 dead and 731 WIA (Wounded in Action). "For at least one week the 1st Marine Division had fought by its book, and it suffered negligible casualties by pounding every objective with preparatory air strikes and artillery concentrations."¹²

Van Fleet, at this point, wanted to try some amphibious envelopments up the coast with the 1st Mar Div and 3rd Infantry Division, but these plans were vetoed by higher headquarters. At the time, intimations that the CCF and North Koreans wanted to negotiate had been sensed in Washington. And UNC wanted to simply drive forward

¹⁰ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 1-37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 18, 1-37.

and seize the Kansas Line (about fifteen miles north of the 38th Parallel), because peace talks were possible, and hold the UN gains at that level.¹³ (See Map # 12)

General Thomas described the first plan for an amphibious hook in 1951, Operation Wrangler, as follows:

Interviewer: An amphibious operation to be executed by 1st Mar Div was planned for 6 June 1951. The objective was to have been Tongchon, followed by a drive southwest toward Kumwha to link up with IX Corps elements driving northeast and cut off the escape of thousands of retiring CCF. Why was this plan abandoned?

Thomas: Owing to Inchon and Wonsan, Almond was pretty amphibious minded, but this plan was “frowned” on by timid souls in Washington who were always disapproving plans giving as their reason – “The Russians might come in.” . . . The plan was to embark at Kansong, land at Tongchon, drive southwest, and occupy the high ground around Hwachon-ni (about 15 miles south west of Tongchon). An armored task force (187th Airborne plus some tanks) had been ordered on 25 May to push up the Inje corridor and seize Kansong on the coast. It got, however, only about four kilometers east of Inje. Later UN lines moved forward to include Kansong.¹⁴

The 1st Mar Div needed time to regroup before another advance, but X Corps’s aggressive commander, MajGen Almond, ordered one anyway. Here, General Thomas of the 1st Mar Div mimicked his predecessor, MajGen O. P. Smith, by not pressing his regimental commanders to advance as fast as Almond wanted, until security and planning for new attacks were more mature.¹⁵

Jagged mountains jutted harsh against the sky to the division’s north in as rugged and forbidding a piece of terrain as any in Korea. An extinct volcano also lay to the north, and the sharp peaks around it caused a big depression like a punchbowl, and gave it its name. High in the Taebaek mountains northeast of the Hwachon Reservoir, roads here were scarce and tactical difficulties many. The Rocky heights and steep

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19-37.

¹⁴ Interview with Gerald C. Thomas by Col C. W. Harrison, 3-4.

¹⁵ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 18-37.

ridges that rippled out from the peaks were a defender's dream and attacker's worst nightmare. And they *were* defended. In this area were some of the fiercest fighters the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) had.¹⁶ (See Map # 13)

June ushered in some of the harshest fighting of the war for the Marines as they drove north to the Kansas Line. Here the 1st Marines lost more men than it had in the Chosin Reservoir Campaign's harshest month, December 1950. The Marine division itself had to pay the butcher 183 KIA (Killed in Action) and almost 2000 WIA to reach its objectives. The battle foreshadowed the fighting that would occur in August and September in the same area, because the Marines could not use artillery effectively because of the high peaks, deep valleys, and uncooperative nature of the terrain, and CAS was slow in coming, inaccurate when it got there, and low in quantity. (Furthermore, artillery use was limited due to imposed restrictions on ammunition by EUSAK.) Here the versatile nature of air power was the perfect supporting weapon, if it could be delivered as the Marines wanted it. With the right selection of armament, and the ability to attack a target from the best direction and angle, even the rear, CAS was what the situation called for. However, the Marines would end up having to do things the hard way with inadequate support, by going cave to cave, bunker to bunker, and pillbox to pillbox with hand grenades and rifle fire to eradicate the enemy.¹⁷

To make matters worse, the NKPA enemy in this area was almost as reluctant to surrender as the Japanese had been in World War II. They held their positions to the last. The Marines would have to pay in blood to own their turf. One World War II veteran called it "the toughest fighting I have ever seen." But that Marine had moved on by

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 12; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 18-37; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," Chapter 15.

August and September, or he might have repeated that remark about the ordeal the Marine division then endured.¹⁸

The Marines finally made their way to the Kansas Line by 20 June. Here they built bunkers to hold the phase line, conducted patrols, and settled down into defensive operations, and that was where matters stood when the Truce Talks broke out on 7 July in Kaesong, Korea (the first talk, however was not until 10 July).¹⁹ (See Maps # 14 and 12)

The Marines spent the rest of June and half of July on the line. Thomas and Almond again challenged the AF (Air Force) system of CAS (Close Air Support), and more plans for an amphibious landing were made by Van Fleet only to again meet veto from higher up.²⁰

Thomas later said of the amphibious operation:

However, the spring offensive was generally a frontal attack, justified undoubtedly by reason of the fact that they were able to break through. A frontal attack is all right if you can make a breakthrough and then exploit it, but by the end of the summer the chance that – Van Fleet simply did not have the power to make a breakthrough, much less make a breakthrough and then exploit it. There was one operation that he took up with me, that had a wonderful prospect. In talking with him, we worked out plans that the First Marine Division, which was at the time in reserve, would move down the east coast of Korea, and there carry out a shore to shore operation and land behind the North Koreans up at the city of Kojo, which was about 30 miles behind the front lines. Now, the front lines abutted the sea on both sides of the peninsula. . . . But this plan to land behind the North Koreans offered splendid prospects. We worked it up, had completely staffed it. I went over with my staff to Seoul, the Eighth Army headquarters, and Admiral Tom Hill, the amphibious commander in the Far East came over with his staff, and we worked out the details. Everything was to be laid on about the 1st of September. We had a limiting date of the 10th of October, because on the 10th of October it freezes out there and it would not be wise to attempt a shore-to-shore

¹⁸ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 25; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2.

¹⁹ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 30-40.

²⁰ Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, as well as interview with C. W. Harrison, no date, page 3.

operation. . . . The gave me the 1st . . . ROK Division, and they were to go on our right flank to the north as we went ashore at Kojo.

. . . We were going to shuttle the troops around in 24 hours and land a whole division and then go back and pick up the ROK Division and land them behind us. The whole thing could have been done in 48 hours and we would have completely destroyed the right flank of the North Korean Army, I don't think there's any doubt about it. We would have been right in behind them.²¹

Later in August, Thomas told Ridgway, on a visit by CINUNC to the Marine area, "We're still interested in that Kojo operation. . . . I can have my men aboard ship in 24 hours." Ridgway replied, "Well, Washington has absolutely turned thumbs down on it. They say if we carry out an operation like that Russia might come into the war." Thomas did not believe this was a likely prospect. "[Russia] will come into this war when they want to come, and nothing that we do or don't do is going to influence it." Considering that the operation was only two divisions, it would have been a paltry excuse indeed for the Soviets to come into the war over it. More likely, Washington didn't want to upset the North Koreans and endanger the negotiations – the Communists did not walk out until the end of the summer. (Some Marines probably thought the JCS and Truman Administration opposed a landing because it might bring more publicity to the Marines at the expense of Army divisions.)²²

Said Millett of the amphibious operations:

. . . Van Fleet did not win approval of his amphibious hook north to Tongchon, but his planners provided some more modest variants that might have put all or part of the 1st Marine Division within ROK I Corps area and closer to the air an naval gunfire support that Task Force 77 could provide. An offensive westwards from the coast might bring the Marines and the ROK I Corps in behind the fortified belt so well manned by the North Koreans. For almost 10 days, Van Fleet and Byers

²¹ *Ibid.*, 877-78.

²² *Ibid.*, 879. It was the opinion of many in the fighting forces at the time and later that Washington had decided that to win against China and North Korea outright might bring in Russia, so D. C. would instead negotiate and avoid any more large military successes in Korea lest it anger Russia. Of course, such a view failed to take into account Washington and NATO's concern for protecting Europe, and that Korea was, in Washington's estimate, only a distraction to bog down UN military forces.

examined their contingency plans and ruled them out as too risky and subject at any moment to another Ridgway veto.²³

Almond was replaced as X Corps commander in July by MajGen Clovis E. Byers. July also brought relief for the Marine division for a time when the 2nd Infantry Division (Inf Div) took over the Marine sector and the 1st Mar Div moved to corps reserve. Here the Marines received replacements, rotated many veterans home, and trained. "We were in need of it [time in reserve]. We weren't particularly tired, but our gear was getting worn. You can't keep your trucks up, you can't keep your material up. So we moved back into reserve and it gave us a chance to refurbish our equipment and also to do some training. Combat is a testing of training, but very often it's not very good training, and you do a lot of things you'd rather not do."²⁴

The training was to get ready for the potential landing, and after that was vetoed, to perfect night operations and small unit tactics. Other training was conducted to reduce the deficit of specialists in the division. In addition, thousands of Korean laborers were added to provide the logistics trucks could not in the trackless mountains.²⁵

General Byers, the X Corps commander, told General Thomas he wanted the 7th Marines [detached from 1st Mar Div] moved up to "'back-stop' the 2nd Inf Div in the event of a penetration. Thomas was not enthusiastic but agreed provided he be permitted to move up and assume command of the 7th Regiment [7th Marines]. Thomas insisted that all Marines in Korea must fight under his command and not under Army command. He

²³ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 43.

²⁴ Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 869; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 30-40.

²⁵ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 3; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 30-40; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 1-12.

particularly didn't want to 'loan' a regiment to Ruffner, CG 2nd Inf Div, who, in Thomas's opinion, would just delight in having a Marine regiment 'chewed up.'"²⁶

The Communists had gained time to regroup in the negotiations, and so walked out of the truce talks in late August, accusing the UN forces of violating the neutral zone around Kaesong. The 1st Mar Div soon received a warning order to prepare to resume the offensive. It would be only a limited one, however, with the objective only to improve the location of the defensive line to gain better terrain. The Marine division found itself on 26 August moving to relieve the 8th ROK Division east of the Punchbowl. Its mission: to seize Corps Objective Yoke on the Hays Line.²⁷ (See Map # 13)

²⁶ Interview with Gerald C. Thomas by Col C. W. Harrison, no date, 6; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 30-40.

²⁷ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 30-40.

CHAPTER 4

MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me, my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than the enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will.

My rifle and I know that what counts in war is not the rounds we fire, the noise of our burst, or the smoke we make. We know that it is the hits that count. We will hit.

My rifle is human, even as I am human, because it is my life. Thus, I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its weaknesses, its strengths, its parts, its accessories, its sights, and its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other.

Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and I are the defenders of my country. We are the masters of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life.

So be it, until victory is America's, and there is no enemy.

--The Marine Rifleman's Creed

The Division had lost experienced men other than casualties by late summer 1951. Many had "rotated" home. "By September of 1951 there were only 4,713 enlisted men remaining in the Division who landed at Inchon the preceding year." Among the replacements added to the division was a high number of Staff NCOs, since the division had a shortage of these. Many of them were veterans of World War II. Between June and October 1951, the 1st Mar Div lost 14,721 men to casualties or rotation. This breaks down as: 11,637 rotation losses, 4,241 battle casualties, and 5,549 nonbattle casualties.

(The resulting total is considerably more than 14,000, but 6,706 casualties returned to duty.) To make up for the losses, the 1st Mar Div received 13,097 men as replacements. That is a turn over rate of over 50 percent in five months.¹ (See Charts # 11, 12, and 13)

Yet even so, the new men began to “belong” very quickly. “In mentioning the reserves, they were very closely integrated into our organization and after they had been with us for a few weeks, I can truthfully state that you could not tell a reserve from a regular.” And “almost two-thirds of the U. S. Marines in Korea were reservists,” by June, 1951. The fighting was to be done by what one historian called a “new division.” That did not mean it was a less effective or efficient outfit, however; the Marine Corps did screen its reservists to ensure a minimum state of training before shipping them out, and they had many from which to choose the cream of the crop.²

Jon Charles Genrich remarked:

The new men were all taking hold of their duties as they had all been through advanced training in the states. Before this time half of our outfit had been reservists, many of whom had never been to a summer camp for training. They were good men, but I heard many stories about how some had never fire an M-1 rifle before coming to Korea. They had trained them by loading rifles and firing them off the fan tail of the ship on the way over to Korea. Many did not even wear their helmets when going into combat. The new men seemed more able to adapt to rules and procedure. The older reservists were tough, hard-fighting men, which sometimes was more important in battle than the type of weapons or equipment being used.³

¹ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-27; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 3; Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 306; U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-26 through 15-29. A Staff Non-Commissioned Officer was any enlisted man with a rank above Sergeant was a Staff NCO, any enlisted man with a rank of either Corporal or Sergeant was referred to as an NCO or Non-Commissioned Officer because they gave orders and led men despite not being a “commissioned” officer, the ranks from Second Lieutenant through General.

² Marine Corps Historical Section Interview with Captain Robert Barrow, October 8, 1951, Marine Corps Korean War document collection CD# 14, part one of interview, page 1; Ronald J. Brown, *Counteroffensive*, 68; U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-27; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East Central Front*, 173.

³ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org. Website last consulted April 2007.

And the rotation policy, too, did not seem to diminish combat effectiveness among the Marines. Rather, quite the opposite was true (so claimed the 1st Mar Div anyway). “[The rotation policy] has been successful and is a most important factor in maintaining morale and efficiency. . . .” In fact, the rotation program was such a success in the division’s eyes that it elected not to participate in EUSAK’s Rest and Rehabilitation Program that rotated personnel to Japan for leave. (Marines usually stayed in the division for about nine months).⁴

There was one caveat to this. The rotation policy did not apply to the KMC Regiment. Their only rotation, at least for the enlisted personnel, was on a stretcher.⁵

For the 7th Marines at least, the rotation policy led to unit pride in one respect. “We didn’t do much but sleep and eat the first few days and then we heard the 13th draft would be coming in to replace our losses. I heard someone say, ‘That’s what the Chinese call the 7th Regiment the Ghost Regiment. They think they have killed most of us off two or three times, but we keep coming back with new Marine replacements.’ The 7th Marines also carried the flag for the First Marine Division since they had fought the rear echelon against several Chinese divisions in the Chosin Reservoir pull back. We had a lot of pride to live up to for the men who went before us.”⁶

Several problems existed concerning the 1 Mar Div. One problem, according to MajGen Frank E. Lowe, USAR (an advisor and close friend of President Truman who was sent on an evaluation trip to Korea in late 1950 through early 1951), was that whereas in the Army there was an abundance of specialists and few fighters, the 1st

⁴ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-3 to 15-27.

⁵ Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, Historical Branch, Headquarters Marine Corps, 22 December, 1958, in file labeled “transcripts,” Marine Corps Korean War document collection, CD #14, page 5.

⁶ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

Marine Division in 1951 had an abundance of fighters and a deficit in specialists. Yet, the only shortcomings assessed by the Pacific Fleet in performance were that junior officers, when rotated in, would have benefited from a brief refresher course on tactics and military subjects before being assigned to combat. However, no criticism of their actual leadership or the quality of the officers themselves was voiced. Besides these detractions, there is no indication in the sources that the 1 Mar Div was any less a competent, battle-ready organization than it had been in 1950 (a time in which, many Marine historians agree, the division was at a peak and was perhaps the “finest” of any Marine fighting force ever assembled.)⁷

The state of training of 1st Mar Div in 1951 on the eve of the September battles was as good as could be expected in the short interval of reserve time (July 15 to August 26), but the training conducted was intense and realistic. Much of it was at night since the CCF (Communist Chinese Forces) and NKPA favored night attacks. “A minimum of 33 percent of all tactical training will be conducted at night, stressing individual and unit night discipline.”⁸

According to the Division Historical Diary, the objective of all the training was to:

. . . Maintain each individual and unit of the command at a high state of professional training and tactical proficiency . . . and to refresh units and staffs in the principles of amphibious operations. . . . to increase proficiency in the use of combined arms and related services; to increase proficiency in amphibious techniques [there were plans, scrapped by higher headquarters, for an amphibious landing behind enemy lines]; to accomplish integration of replacement personnel into the various units of this command in a minimum

⁷ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” chapter 15; Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 306, 315; Major General Frank E. Lowe, USAR. “Report of Mission, 2 August 1950--23 April 1951” (Frank E. Lowe File, Truman Papers, 1951); U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” chapter 15; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, Chapter 16; Robert D. Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, Chapter 10.

⁸ Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 2.

length of time; and to develop technical and tactical proficiency in the individual Marine and the units of this command.⁹

Subjects covered included “boat team training; mines and booby traps; tank-infantry tactics; assault of a defended beach; tactical training of the individual Marine; battalion in the attack and defense; regiment in the attack and defense; platoon assault and reduction of fortified position; and the tactical employment and firing of all weapons.”¹⁰

For example, the 1st Marines conducted a field problem on August 20 that lasted four days. It involved, “an attack and a retrograde upon CCF units. The problem was highly successful in that it exercised the staff in further integrating the actions of the companies and battalions into an even more smoothly functioning organization, and personnel in unfamiliar positions were given a chance to operate under near combat conditions.”¹¹

Another illustration of Marine training during the period, and the method by which Marines would assault defended bunkers in September, occurred on a “gloomy, dank and depressing day at the height of the Korean monsoon.” A platoon of Marines slogged up the muddy hills of their reserve area in column while water ran down their backs beneath their ponchos. “Their problem was a demonstration, a platoon assaulting a fortified position with supporting weapons.” The lieutenant detailed the purpose of the problem to the men: “Men, today you will witness the proper method of assaulting and securing a fortified position with a minimum number of casualties.” And blocks of TNT were set off on the ridge to simulate an artillery barrage (shells were in too short a

⁹ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 2-3.

¹⁰ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

supply to use real ones in a training problem at the time). Three heavy MGs (Machine Guns) poured fire over the head of the advancing platoon as the attack commenced.¹²

From defilade, rocketmen (armed with 3.5 inch bazookas) rose and fired into the opening of a pillbox. Then the Marines charged the position and “mopped up.” One veteran of ten months with the division said to a new private, “Get this, Mac. . . . that is the way we have been doing it. Working together as a team pays off.”¹³

Being in reserve was not all work. In the evenings, movies were shown for the enjoyment of the troops. In the 1st Marines area, the men gathered in a rice paddy to see films “projected onto a sheet stretched between two posts.” Also, in every regiment and battalion, there was a heavy emphasis on organized sports for recreation and physical conditioning such as football, softball, baseball, and boxing. Sometimes competitions in various sports were held between battalions both for entertainment and fostering of *esprit de corps*. Some Marines may have even learned soccer or a “sort of rugby called ‘Ch’u-Ku’” from the Korean laborers.¹⁴

The 1st Mar Div’s period in reserve also included patrolling and strengthening of defensive lines. For example, the 7th Marines on 7-8 August had one squad of Baker Company (1/7) patrolling while Able Company worked on defenses of the Wichita Line. (The Wichita and Switch Lines were two defensive lines the Marines constructed defenses on while in reserve. The lines were just north of Inje and south of the Kansas Line. These were built in case UN forces had to withdraw further south. The withdrawing

¹² Public Information Document by Sgt. Gary Cameron, Marine Combat Correspondent, dated 23 August 1951, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, “Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952,” pages 1-2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ Oral account of PFC Lyle Conaway, in: Donald Knox, *The Korean War: Uncertain Victory: The Concluding Volume of an Oral History* (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988): 295; Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, “Historical Diary,” 33.

forces could have already built defenses to pull back too. Another reason these were built is for a greater layer of defenses behind the Kansas Line to contain any potential Communist penetration.) The construction consisted of such priorities as “clear fields of fire, defensive wire, tactical wire, open emplacements, covered emplacements, reverse-slope trails”¹⁵

Other elements of the regiment likewise patrolled or conducted training. Most patrols resulted in negative enemy contact though one discovered the wreckage of an F4U Corsair plane (a propeller driven fighter-bomber aircraft used throughout World War II and Korea by the Marine Corps and Navy for Close Air Support). Others found caches of enemy ammo (some booby trapped), or the bodies of dead U. S. soldiers killed in earlier fighting (some of which also were booby trapped). Some of the soldiers found were wearing winter issue clothing and had not even been buried. Such was the fluid and desperate nature of the previous winter's combat. The mission of these patrols was “to determine the extent of enemy activity and unusual civilian activity . . .” in the area. Such was a typical day in corps reserve.¹⁶

The division was in reserve for only two and a half months before it was again committed to combat. For the men new to the division, that was not very long to “snap in,” as Marines called getting thoroughly acquainted with a new unit or weapon hands-on.¹⁷

¹⁵ Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, Regimental Frag Orders 021400 and 071330; Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 2-5; Third Battalion, Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 3; Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 2-4.

¹⁶ Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, Regimental Frag Orders 021400 and 071330; Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 2-5; Third Battalion, Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 3; Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 2-4.

¹⁷ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 3.

In late August, three of the division's regiments were given warning orders to prepare for a move from reserve areas to assembly areas to organize for reemployment in the offensive. (For 3/7, their warning order on August 26 did not even include "destination, time, attachments [or] situation.") The other units of X Corps had bogged down and the Marines were needed to relieve elements of the 2nd Inf Div and 8th ROK (Republic of Korea) Div so the offensive could get moving again. From the positions formerly occupied by the units relieved, the X Corps plan called on the 1st Mar Div for "the execution of a limited objective attack to seize the high ground north of the Punchbowl and along the Inje-Changhang axis." On August 31, the 1st Mar Div was to attack Yoke Ridge and take it for a new EUSAK defensive line forward of Line Kansas (to be called the Hays Line).¹⁸ (See Map # 13)

The CINCUNC (Commander in Chief United Nations Command), General Matthew B. Ridgway, said of the area's value:

Another area the enemy held dear was an ancient volcanic crater we named the Punchbowl, about twenty-five miles north of Inje, and the same distance from the east coast, near the zone boundary of U. S. X and ROK I Corps. Its rim was nearly knife-sharp all around the edges, rising abruptly several hundred feet above the crater floor, and thickly wooded on every side. The enemy was solidly entrenched on the rim here and well armed with mortars and artillery. Much blood was spilled in the coming months to win control of this area. In the Eighth Army's possession, it would shorten the line, provide better observation, and lessen the chance of strong enemy surprise attacks in that quarter. Once we had seized it, we never gave it up.¹⁹

X Corps's overall goal, dictated by EUSAK on 21 July, was to probe Communist positions and determine their strength, keep them off balance and unable to launch

¹⁸ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 1; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 38; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," (August 1951), 1, 3; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IIX-IX; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, Division OpnO 19-51.

¹⁹ Oral Account of General Matthew B. Ridgway in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 378.

another offensive, hone the edge of X Corps's fighting units lest they become soft through inactivity, and improve the defensive line in the corps sector by "elbowing" forward to take better, more commanding terrain and remove sags in the line—in other words, straighten it out. Straighter lines meant shorter lines, and shorter lines meant less linear miles of territory to fortify and defend. It also meant fewer salients and bulges, which were more vulnerable to enemy attack, penetration, exploitation, and encirclement. Shorter defense lines furthermore allowed EUSAK to use fewer men to defend the line and pool the remainder in reserve to counter an enemy attack, or perhaps make one of its own if the truce talks produced no results.²⁰

The terrain north of the Punchbowl was also critical, because in enemy hands it could be used to observe the defenses on the Kansas Line to call in supporting fire on it. If this terrain were in UN hands, not only would the enemy be deprived of this observation, another advantage would be that the UNC (United Nations Command) forces could make it difficult for the enemy to launch attacks against the UN MLR (United Nations) (Main Line of Resistance) in this sector from yet more overlooking high ground.²¹

Of course, the "ground-pounders" who fought there remembered the terrain differently. Jon Charles Genrich observed:

²⁰ Walter G. Hermes, *United States Army in the Korean War: Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington, D. C.: United States Army Center of Military History, 1992, first published 1966): 81-82; Headquarters EUSAK, "Command Report," July 1951, book 1, "Commanding General's Journal," 21 July 1951, (National Archives, RG 407, Records of U. S. Army Field Commands, Command Reports, 1949-1954); Headquarters EUSAK, "Command Report," July 1951, section I, 8; Headquarters X Corps, "Command Report," August 1951, (National Archives, RG 407, Records of U. S. Army Field Commands, Command Reports, 1949-1954): 45; Headquarters X Corps, "Command Report," September 1951, (National Archives, RG 407, Records of U. S. Army Field Commands, Command Reports, 1949-1954): 3.

²¹ Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 81-82; Headquarters EUSAK, "Command Report," July 1951, book 1, "Commanding General's Journal," 21 July 1951; Headquarters X Corps, "Command Report," August 1951, 45; Headquarters X Corps, "Command Report," September 1951, 3.

When I speak of “hills,” they should actually be called “mountains.” They were rough and rugged, covered with pines and other trees. Most of the hills on the east coast were only 3,000-4,000 feet high, but when starting at near sea level, that was tall. We soon learned that going up was easier than going down. When it got too steep going up we could go on all fours. The problem going down carrying 60 to 80 pounds was that if we lost our footing and fell, we knew we would probably only be stopped when we hit a tree 20 or 30 feet down the hill. All we could do was hope that we would survive.²²

X Corps first attempted to use only a portion of its strength to accomplish its objective, and because the truce-talks were still under way until August 23, only ROK units were to be utilized. It was during attacks in mid August that the 36th ROK Regiment attached to the U. S. 2nd Inf Div, and the 8th ROK Div, ran into problems, namely high casualties for minor advances, and formidable enemy resistance in heavily fortified, inaccessible terrain. This led X Corps commander, MajGen (Major General) Byers, after the Communists walked out of the peace-talks, to widen the attack to include the whole corps front. An attack by 1 Mar Div to the east of the Punchbowl would alleviate the difficulties these other X Corps units were having with “Bloody Ridge” to the west, drawing away NKPA firepower and resources, thus “relieving pressure” and helping that action to succeed. It was to this end that he set a new defensive/phase line, Line Hays, north of the Kansas Line. This line was the objective for the Marines’ assault.²³ (See Map # 13)

Monsoon season was heavy in Korea that year, and so the roads soon became choked with vehicles and equipment bogged down in the thick and ever abundant mud. Portions of the narrow, ill-kept, and sparse roads were wiped out in mudslides, and

²² Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

²³ Headquarters EUSAK, “Command Report,” August 1951, G-3 section, book 4, part 3, Message from Van Fleet to Byers dated 14 August 1951 (National Archives, RG 407, Records of U. S. Army Field Commands, Command Reports, 1949-1954); Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 85; Korea Institute of Military History, *The Korean War, Vol. 3* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, originally published in Seoul, Korea, 1999), 148-49.

bridges had been swept away due to flooding. It would be a laborious trek to get the Marine units to their assembly areas, and the speed of movement was impeded very much by the weather. Some units had to travel as far as sixty miles.²⁴

In what would normally have been only a five hour movement by vehicle, the 7th Marines and 1st KMC (the KMC regiment) took nearly three days to make the trek to relieve units of the 2nd Infantry Division, USA (U. S. Army), and the 8th ROK Division, and then ready for the attack. Departure was 27 August, and arrival was late 29 August. The 5th Marines (-) would follow soon after (that was the plan anyway). The Division did not have use of its other infantry regiment, the 1st Marines.²⁵

This latter unit was in corps reserve and would remain so until September 11—as it turned out, however, the 1st Marines would be committed *before* the 5th Marines. While in corps reserve, the 1st Marines was not under the control of General Thomas but under X Corps. It would have to be released back to him for use in battle; and the 5th Marines in division reserve had to guard the division's sector of Line Kansas, responsibility of which, the 1st Mar Div still had to maintain and man defenses of, even while the rest of its elements were engaged in combat to the north.²⁶

Despite the slow going, upon word that increasing enemy pressure had the 2nd Inf Div in possible need of immediate relief, "units of the Division continued the

²⁴ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 4, 5.

²⁵ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 4; Seventh Marines "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IX; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 1; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 2. The 1st Marines was not to be released except under authority of X Corps. It was to be the core of Task Force Able.

²⁶ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IX; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 1; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 2; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2.

displacement with every effort being made to expedite the move in order to be prepared for any change in the mission assigned.”²⁷

The first objective was one assigned by X Corps, hence it was called a “corps objective,” (an objective assigned by the division would be called a “division objective” and so on). Called Yoke Ridge, it resembled the jagged maw of an angry dragon in its topographical contours on a map. (See Map # 15) This ridge was made up of hills 930, 1000, 1026, 924, and 702 on the east-west axis, and hills, 602, 702, 680, 755, and 793 on its north-south axis. It would be part of the Hays Line, the next phase/defensive line in the plan for X Corps’s “limited objective” advance. Yoke Ridge, too, had the Soyang River at its back, and other knife edge ridges branched off from it. Pine and brush concealed a multitude of defensive emplacements on its slopes constructed from earth and logs. Direct pinpoint hits from heavy supporting arms *and* the assault of infantry Marines would be needed to reduce most of them; the enemy had no intention of fleeing.²⁸

In fact, the defenders, the 6th Regiment, 2d Division, II NKPA Corps, had orders to hold at all costs. North Korean officers that allowed their units to retreat had only execution as their reward. The enemy in the area was well armed and well supplied, AF (Air Force) efforts to render the opposite effect through interdiction notwithstanding. In artillery, the enemy had more tubes than the Marines by a ratio of 92 to 72 guns, many of them in large calibers. (The enemy also had a number about equal to the Marines in mortars and machine guns.) The NKPAs were also extremely accurate in the employment of their artillery. While standing around a campfire one night in a rearward

²⁷ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 4.

²⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IX; U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” chapter 15. The hills were named for height in meters above sea level.

area in September, one group of Marine tankers was hit with a pair of shells, one landing smack in the middle of the fire. The NKPA also had abundant ammunition with which to assault not only pre-determined targets, but also targets of opportunity.²⁹

The NKPA's had another favored tactic. They zeroed in their own positions with mortars and artillery from other positions. (Often, these pieces were hauled by pack animals.) More than one group of Marines, elated with the joy of victory in crushing the defenses of a formerly NKPA hill, suddenly found themselves under heavy, accurate fire from enemy supporting arms. The enemy also had watering holes zeroed in with artillery. Many KMCs (abbreviation meaning Marines from the regiment of the Korean Marine Corps attached to the 1st Mar Div) were hit while trying to fill their canteens.³⁰

The NKPA artillery fire usually came in twos and threes at the same range. This knowledge helped PFC George R. Pealer of Nevada get a wounded Marine to safety. The wounded Marine had been blinded and lost a foot in a landmine blast and needed immediate medical attention. Pealer took the windshield off his jeep, strapped the wounded man's stretcher to the hood, and prepared to run the gauntlet of NKPA fire along the road to the rear. At the Soyang River, an enemy shell hit 100 yards to their front. Pealer hit the gas and passed that point as two more shells struck behind them. The trip was successful, and the wounded Marine was given aid at a field hospital. The NKPA also would infiltrate through UN lines and lay ambushes along roads. "The

²⁹ U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 15-24; Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, 22 December 1958, page 5; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; Matthew B. Ridgway, *Korean War*, 186; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 15-19; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 1; Oscar Gilbert, *Marine Corps Tank Battles in Korea*, (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2003), 194; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IX; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 1.

³⁰ Second Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," 10; Burton Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 233; Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, 22 December, 1958, page 2-3.

ambush technique employed by the enemy consists of throwing hand grenades into a vehicle as it passes and then following up the grenade blast with small arms fire.”³¹

As for fortifications, the NKPA bunkers were strong and comparable to those of the Japanese on Tarawa, though on a smaller scale of strength (the Tarawa defenses also had concrete and were made to withstand NGF (Naval Gunfire), these in Korea were fortified against artillery and bomb attack). There was at least a rumor that the enemy was on constant orders to add one meter a day of earth to his emplacements. The enemy was confident enough in the strength of his bunkers that he often called down artillery fire on his *own* positions *while yet in them*. He often did this when Marines were almost atop them.³²

The tactical doctrine governing the NKPA forces was based on that of the Chinese and Soviets, particularly that of Mao Tze Tung and his “ten principles of war by which the CCF fight.” These tenets were very like the principles of Sun Tzu.³³

A EUSAK report on enemy tactics said:

Since a large portion of the cadre of the North Korean People’s Army served with the Chinese Communist Forces in battle against the Japanese, North Korean tactics employed against United Nations Forces were similar to CCF and Soviet Russian tactics. . . . All Commanding Generals and other key officers of all North Korean People’s Army divisions were Chinese Communist Forces and/or Soviet trained. Many North Korean People’s Army noncommissioned officers also had undergone extensive Chinese Communist Forces training.³⁴

³¹ First Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 14; Undated Public Information Document by Sgt. Frank L. Creasy, Marine Combat Correspondent, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, “Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952.”

³² Second Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 92; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 192; Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 7.

³³ Headquarters, Eighth U. S. Army Korea, Monograph entitled “Enemy Tactics,” December, 1951 (National Archives: RG 407, Records of U. S. Army Field Commands, Command Reports, 1949-1954): vii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

Another report, this one from IX Corps headquarters, described the use of Sun Tzu in the enemy method of warfare:

While new weapons have been added to their armies, the cardinal principles of warfare as laid down in SUN TZU's "Art of War," published in 510 BC, still constitute the fundamental doctrine of the oriental field commander. Where the enemy lacks firepower he attempts to gain superiority by massing his manpower; where the enemy must gain surprise to achieve success, he creates surprise by attacking across the most inaccessible terrain; where the enemy needs maneuverability he subjects his troops to grueling forced marches. Throughout these studies it is apparent that, in true Communist fashion, "the end always justifies the means." Weapons and other equipment are valued above manpower—time is bountiful.³⁵

Thus the enemy the Marines fought had long training and experience in war and sound principles to guide him. Some of the troops were green, peasants forced into service as soldiers to replace heavy losses, but the Communist leaders, officers and NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officers) were experienced and well trained.

Another tactic of the NKPA encountered by Marines in this battle was an abundance of enemy mines, supplemented in danger in some locations by the unmarked mines left by the ROK units. Some were Soviet box mines, explosive charges in a wooden crate that could be buried underneath the ground. These could disable a tank and were usually undetectable by mine detection equipment because they were made of wood rather than metal. Some of these had dynamite charges beneath them in excess of 100 pounds. Other mines were everything from conventional anti-personnel mines, to the improvised type: mortar rounds buried fuse-up in the dirt, to Bangalore torpedoes (these last were usually captured from UN forces). The NKPA's liked to place mines in pairs on either side of a trail, but often left the trails themselves clear. The

³⁵ G-2 Section (Intelligence), Headquarters IX Corps, EUSAK, "Enemy Tactics, Techniques, and Doctrine," September 1951 (National Archives, RG 407, Records of U. S. Army Field Commands, Command Reports, 1949-1954): foreword.

Marines, seeking to avoid mines, would walk off the trails and get hit. "To make the mine more deadly the enemy has adopted the practice of burying two or three mines one on top of the other. Mines of this sort have blown wheels and various parts of equipment and bodies as far as 200 feet."³⁶

By and large, the most commonly encountered anti-personnel mine employed by the CCF and NKPA is the serrated steel pipe type. These mines, filled with 1 ½ pounds of 60 per cent dynamite, have an effective bursting radius of 100 yards. These mines are used in hasty or deliberate minefields in front of defensive positions. This type of mine is put to additional use in the construction of booby traps.³⁷

The mines were in abundance to say the least. After the battle, on September 22, the 1st Mar Div's 1st Engineer Battalion checked over 1/1's (1st Bn, 1st Marines) area and found 37 anti-personnel mines, and 1 booby-trapped M-1 rifle.³⁸

The NKPA also liked to booby trap their dead and "souvenirs." One Marine, Floyd Baxter, remembered:

We thought the path we had chosen for the trip had been cleared of mines, but we were cautious, nevertheless. I stepped over a body which had been burned by napalm. As an afterthought, I turned to warn the man behind me to leave the body alone, as it might be booby trapped. The butt of a burp gun stuck out from under the blackened body. Before I could speak, I saw the guy reach down for the gun. I yelled! It was the last thing the man heard. The concussion knocked me down, and the blast blew the other guy's hand and most of his face off.³⁹

Another Marine, Ralph B. Steele, a BAR man with Fox 2/7, described the temptation such souvenirs offered:

Well . . . the word came down that sergeant had stepped out and . . . he says, "I don't want none of you guys fucking with them souvenirs . . . they might be booby trapped. Well, I looked [at this burp gun laying in the bush] and it was certainly no

³⁶ 1 Mar Div Type "C" Special Report on Mine Warfare, 28 May-15 July, 1951, (U. S. Marine Corps Korean War Document Collection CD # 15): 2; Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 885; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 7; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, 22 December, 1958, page 2.

³⁷ Headquarters U. S. IX Corps, "Enemy Tactics, Techniques, and Doctrine," 14.

³⁸ First Marines "Historical Diary," September 1951, 22.

³⁹ Oral account of PFC Floyd Baxter, Weapons Company, 1/1, in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 307.

booby trap. I mean, I could see it laying right there. And it was brand new. Man, it still had fresh oil on it and whatnot and boy is that tempting. . . .⁴⁰

Besides mines and booby-trapped corpses, the woods (this area was heavily timbered) were full of other lethal devices. Ralph B. Steele remembered:

There's a wire stretched across this path wired to a mortar round . . . actually it was wired to a grenade . . . the pin would come out of the grenade, detonate the grenade and the mortar round, and it was at about head high. Well, the guy two guys in front of me tripped this wire, of course yelled "Trip Wire!" Well, you're so keyed up, I imagine I was on the ground before the word wire ever got out of his mouth.⁴¹

Luckily for Steele, the device did not go off. Unluckily for a friend of his who came along later, the soldier that had rigged the device had planned for it to not go off on the first trip. The device was taped with electrical tape and the first time it was triggered, the grenade just twisted in the tape, the second time it could not twist anymore and so went off and killed his friend.⁴²

Another tactical problem for the Marines was caused by terrain, and the NKPA exploited it to the hilt. Many of the ridges in the area of the Punchbowl were perpendicular to one another, forming mutually supporting ridgelines that forced an attacker assaulting one ridge to receive enfilade or flanking fire from the other ridge. (See Photo # 1) "It was a mountain warfare variation of crossing the T that the Korean Reds were using against the Marines. Whenever possible, the enemy made a stand on a hill flanked by transverse ridgelines. He emplaced hidden machine guns and mortars

⁴⁰ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele by Larry Ordner for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, dated August 28, 2002. Transcript available online at: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02616/transcript?ID=sr001>. Website last consulted April 2007.

⁴¹ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress.

⁴² *Ibid.*

on these ridgelines to pour a converging fire into attackers limited by the terrain to a single approach.”⁴³

One Marine approach to deal with this was “ridge running.” Major Gerald P. Averill, the S-3 (operations officer) of 2/5 (2nd Bn, 5th Marines) during September 1951, described how his CO executed such a technique:

His method was to attack along the long axis of a ridgeline wherever possible, regardless of whether the ridge ran parallel to the direction of attack or perpendicular to it. Gain the high ground from the flanks and rear and then advance along the long axis, rolling up the enemy as you moved. Security elements, squads or fire teams could work down the finger ridges and clear them from the rear. The attack might be launched using a single company along a single ridge line or, by employing two or more companies, adjacent ridge lines could be cleared simultaneously. If the ridge line formed a cross-compartment, we would forego [*sic*] a frontal attack and, by a series of flanking actions, gain the high ground and attack along the narrow, hard-to-defend, long axis. Of course, he told us, there would be instances when we would be forced into a stand-up-and-walk-in slugging match, but if we were careful and used the ridges properly, we would not get our noses bloodied too often.⁴⁴

The Punchbowl Offensive of Fall 1951, however, *would* be one of those nose-bloodying occasions. On the tactical level, the terrain would dictate little maneuver, and the Marines would be forced to frontal assault many of the enemy positions.⁴⁵

The 7th Marines had to cross the Soyang River to get to their assembly areas. The river was high and the current was strong from flooding. Some battalions had to use amphibious trucks (DUKWs) to make the crossing.⁴⁶

⁴³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 138; “Intelligence Study FMF,” 7 April to 31 August 1951, “Tactical Study of Weather and Terrain: Yanggu-Inje Area,” and “Tactical Study of Mandae-ri Area,” Marine Corps Korean war document CD collection, CD #15, page 7-8 of the latter, particularly.

⁴⁴ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang: A Combat Marine*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988): 215-16.

⁴⁵ However, *speaking of the operational level*, General Thomas said:

. . . There’s nothing wrong with a frontal assault carried out the right way, where you seek out some enemy resistance and break through them, and Ridgway did that all the way up the peninsula. . . . You won’t find Army officers going to the sea. Army officers will always want to fight on land, just like they did at Okinawa [referring to the veto of a shore to shore operation there to get behind the Japanese defenses]. So they just battered their way up the peninsula, and there wasn’t anything particularly wrong with it because Ridgway had the strength to break through and exploit it. He made real progress after he took command of Eighth Army. . . . --Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 881-82.

Charles Hughes was a corpsman with How Company, 3/7. He was with the Marines waiting for DUKWs to take them across the river:

On the 27th of August we got orders to move out and relieve ROK Army units on the Kansas Line. We folded up our tents and readied our equipment for the move, then sat around in a driving rain from the typhoon, waiting for the trucks to take us on and carry us to and across the shallow Soyang-gang River. But the trucks failed to arrive so we ended up eating our noon meal sitting on the crates and equipment we had readied for the move. We were compensated for our wait by plentiful hot food that the galley crews needed to get rid of before the move. But after the feast we continued to sit in the pouring rain waiting for the trucks until it was time for the evening meal. This time we were back to the old reliable C Rations. Still we waited, and it was not until 9 o'clock that evening that the trucks finally showed up, and it was 10:45 before we got moving. The 3rd Battalion was the last unit to move out, and in the meantime the downpour from the typhoon had grown even more intense. . . .

. . . We didn't reach the assembly area until 4 am. It was another two hours before we reached the battalion assembly area where we were told to stay on the trucks, and it was 7:45 before the convoy moved once again. The trucks were having a difficult time on the muddy rutted road, and finally had to off load us and attempt to back up and turn around and get out of there. Battalion officers were running up and down the long convoy trying to break the log jam and get the trucks moving. At about 2 pm the rest of us began to slog toward the Soyang-gang to prepare for the crossing. The torrential rains by this time had turned this small mountain stream into a rapidly flowing swollen river. . . once more we waited. But we didn't wait long, for soon the word came that the Ducks [DUKWs] had been delayed. So the battalion started to ford the river. . . .

Two hours later How Company still had not made it across, and their attempt had taken a toll. The swift stream had carried Marines downstream and many of them reached the opposite bank far from the point where they entered the river. . . . [Some drowned.]

The battalion spent the next three days drying out radios and equipment and recovering from that battle with nature, and after that we were back in the fight.⁴⁷

Jon Charles Genrich described C Rations:

The C-rations were small cans of ham and lima beans, spaghetti, beans and weenies, sausage or hamburger patties packed in lard, and corned beef hash. We normally didn't have a chance to pick, but had to take what was available in the box. A lot [of] the men wouldn't eat corned beef hash or lima beans. . . . The

⁴⁶ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 175-76; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6.

⁴⁷ Charles Hughes, *Accordion War: Korea 1951, Life and Death in a Marine Rifle Company*, (Trafford Publishing: Victoria, BC, 2006): 275-76.

box also contained a couple of dry, hard, round crackers, cocoa, and toilet paper.⁴⁸

One other How 3/7 Marine recalled the rain in the move up to Yoke Ridge, and remarked “It started to rain the last day as we loaded up on the trucks. They drove for several hours in the rain and mud. We were all soaking wet sitting in the open bed of the ‘four deuces’ [4.2 inch mortar] trucks, as we called them. When they stopped and dumped us off to walk in the rain and deep mud, we realized that riding in the rain wasn’t really that bad.” That night was even more miserable. “We were hungry, wet, cold Marines, lying in a mud hole with the water soaking through the sleeping bag. Every ten minutes we would roll over and it would feel dry for a few minutes, but we could not sleep so we prayed for morning to come.”⁴⁹

August 30 saw two battalions of the 1st KMC at the line of departure -- the other battalion was still defending the Kansas line. The two KMC battalions would attack the next morning from Hill 755 towards Hill 924. (See map # 16) Similarly, two battalions of the 7th Marines were moving into place and ready to attack the next day. The First Battalion Seventh Marines (1/7) was on the east side of the river, near Tonpyong, in the emplacements of the 8th ROK Division (16th Regiment) atop a mass of hills. The 3rd Battalion, Seventh Marines (3/7) was organizing west of the river near their crossing point, while 2/7 relieved elements of the 8th ROK Division (23rd Regiment) on the Kansas Line. Mortar rounds from the enemy greeted 1/7 that night (29 August) in welcome, a small taste of things to come—twenty-nine rounds near a bridge on the MSR (Main Supply Route) to the south, and one artillery round destroyed an

⁴⁸ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

⁴⁹ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

ammunition truck. Able Company received 100 rounds of 82mm mortar fire, too, on the afternoon of the 30th.⁵⁰

A small enemy probe was beaten back at 2221, August 29, by Item 3/7, and Baker Company (1/7) received SA (small arms) fire. Interestingly, one Marine sniper of Able 1/7 hit two enemy at 900 yards range.⁵¹

August 30 had its share of disappointments. A tactical air observer saw a target of opportunity, an enemy troop formation in the open. He immediately contacted the chain of command for air strikes, which filtered the request for air support to hit this enemy formation, up through the intervening levels to JOC (Joint Operations Center). Over three hours later, planes finally arrived, but the target of opportunity had been lost. This did not surprise the Marines; CAS (Close Air Support) for the entire Eighth Army was limited to only 96 sorties a day, and with the time consuming request system under the JOC, targets of opportunity could usually only be hit with planes if the target happened to show up while an air strike was already overhead, an all too infrequent occurrence.⁵²

Of significance was the fact that coincidental with this offensive, 8th Army and 5th Air Force agreed to limit close air support sorties of the entire front to 96 per day, applying the remainder to the interdiction program. This limitation continued through September [1951], despite heavy requirements for close air support by attacking UN divisions. As a result, less than 85 close air support sorties a day were averaged by aircraft under 5th Air Force control. This included those of the 1st Marine Air Wing.⁵³

⁵⁰ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 176; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," chapter 15; Seventh Marines "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6.

⁵¹ Seventh Marines "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6.

⁵² "1st Marine Division Report on CAS," 1 Mar Div file dated 4 October 1951, "Report of Close Air Support," Letter of CG (commanding general) 1MarDiv, MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, to CG Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, LtGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, dated 4 October 1951, enclosure one, (Marine Corps Korean War document CD collection, CD #15 of 25 (Washington, D.C.: Marine Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, 2005, copy in my possession). Hereafter, the preceding document, which includes many letters on the subject of CAS from the time period, will be cited as "1MarDiv 'Report of CAS.'" Also see chapter on Close Air Support.

⁵³ U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 9-14.

The Marine units also sent out patrols on August 30. One from the 1st KMC ran into a platoon-sized firefight at 1000. The enemy withdrew after a half-hour of combat, leaving three counted dead. About 200 rounds of mortar and 76mm fire hit the positions of the 7th Marines throughout the same day. Back on the Kansas Line, the 5th Marines had 14 men wounded by booby traps. Marines of 3/7 patrolled to Hill 602 with no enemy contact. Marine artillery fired 2,040 rounds by night-fall, August 30, in close and deep support. That night, mortar and artillery fire continued to pepper Marine positions and more light enemy probes were repulsed. The next day would begin the last offensive of the Korean War for the 1st Mar Div.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 7; Seventh Marines "Historical Diary," August 1951, 6.

CHAPTER 5

PHASE ONE: THE SEIZURE AND DEFENSE OF YOKE RIDGE

Day One: August 31

The attack orders came from division in the form of Division OpnO 22-51 (OpnO is short for Operation Order). The 7th Marines and 1st KMC were to be the attacking forces. Jump-off time (commonly referred to as “H-Hour” by Marines) would be 0600 on 31 August. The LD (Line of Departure) would be an imaginary line from Hill 755 northeast almost to Tonpyong. (See Maps # 17 and 18) At the time, there was much talk from POWs taken in the sector that another large-scale Communist offensive was imminent, and the division knew that Yoke Ridge was being reinforced by the enemy, possibly in preparation for the offensive. POWs reported that the Communist attack was to begin as early as 1 September. Intel (intelligence) reported that as many as three enemy regiments were enroute to reinforce Yoke, and more artillery was known to accompany them. The division attack the first day was intended to push the NKPA off the right end of the ridge and cut off further enemy reinforcement to it, then roll up the remainder of defenders from east to west. Third battalion, seventh Marines (3/7) was to take the part of the ridge east of Hill 924 (Hills 602 and 702), “Division Objective 2;” the 1st KMC regiment, Hills 924 and 1026, “Division Objective 3.” “Division Objective 1” was to the east across the river; 1/7 had already occupied it without a fight. (See Map # 18)¹

¹ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, Msg 301206K ; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IX; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 40-41; U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” chapter 15; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 6-8. The enemy was relieving the II NK Corps with III NK Corps, of which the 1st NKPA Division was a part.

While the attack proceeded on Yoke Ridge, the 5th Marines was to continue patrolling the Kansas Line. The 1st Marines was still in X Corps reserve. Other elements of the division, such as the Division Reconnaissance Company, mopped up bypassed enemy to the rear of the forward-most area. The four available battalions (total) of the 1st KMC and 7th Marines would have to go it alone for now.²

The 1st KMC was anticipated to have the toughest job on 31 August, and even though they were Koreans and not Caucasian Americans, the Marine Division did not treat them any differently in its favoring them with “priority of air support” that day.³

The 1st KMC added a good deal of firepower to 1st Mar Div. The U. S. Pacific Fleet “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” commented:

This unit had been attached to the Division since 18 March 1951, and has played an important part in most of the Division’s operations. The 1st KMC Regiment had been organized and trained under U. S. Marine supervision and had the same basic organization as a Marine infantry regiment. It lacked only some of the more heavy and complex supporting weapons and equipment typical of a Marine Regimental Combat Team. During most of the period Marine artillery provided direct and general support to the 1st KMC Regiment. Attached U. S. Marine TACP provided close air support for the Koreans. . . . The 1st KMC Regiment provided the command of 1st Marine Division with a fourth infantry regiment of good quality and had an important effect upon the Division’s ability to deploy, maneuver, and attain its assigned objectives. . . . It thereby permitted better infantry deployment in the mountainous terrain where infantry strength was always of utmost value. It also permitted the Division to rotate and relieve Marine regiments on the line more frequently and to sustain its offensive momentum. The Division was able to maintain a regiment in reserve, and flank and rear area security were better insured.⁴

Also on the subject of the KMCs, General Thomas once assessed their value in glowing terms: “Oh, they were a fine fighting outfit. Oh yes. . . .They had good

² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, chapter IX; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 1, 7. The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was on the Kansas Line at the time and the 2nd Battalion of the KMC was, too.

³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 1, 7.

⁴ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-37.

commanders. I think maybe they'd been selected. Most of their commanders had been Japanese trained, you know. . . . But there wasn't anything wrong with the Korean Marines. They did some of the best fighting that was done for us.”⁵

On August 30, to prepare for the attack, the KMC regiment placed its 3rd Battalion (3/KMC) on Hill 793 halfway between Yoke Ridge and Line Kansas. From here, this battalion outposted one company at Wolsan-ryong, a mountain pass near Hill 755 (See Map # 16).⁶

Two battalions of the 1st KMC were the assault battalions for the regiment for this first attack and they jumped off in column of battalions from Hill 793, sweeping by Wolsan-ryong to pickup the outpost company along the way. The 3rd Battalion KMC (3/KMC) was to take Hill 924 (which it called Mao Tze Tung Hill to stoke its Marines to greater aggressiveness and make them realize their honor was at stake) while 1/KMC passed beyond 924 to assail 1026 (called Kim Il Sung Hill by the Korean Marines). Their biggest troubles in the way of resistance shortly proved to be mine fields.⁷

Ralph B. Steele described his unit's encounter with these later in the battle:

We come off this main stream and start up a little narrow path, and the word comes down we're finding mines . . . but they got a guy up ahead, some volunteer with a bayonet is probing in this rocky path, and when they find a mine they take the ass wipe out of the C rations and they make a flag out of it and stick it where the mine is. . . . They're only showing you the mines they find. There might be other mines there. . . . I stepped exactly where the guy in front of me stepped. So [we had] to keep calling constantly . . . “hold the interval, hold the interval. So I'm stepping right where he steps then they said take five and don't get off the path. Squat right where you are. . . . So in the meantime they've been trying to get mortar rounds into this real narrow ravine, but the rounds are coming over and they couldn't wiggle them in there. They were detonating on the bank

⁵ Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 872-73.

⁶ Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 151.

⁷ Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 260-61.; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 7-8. Korean Marines had more than just honor at stake in the fight, however, for if they were captured by the NKPA they could expect only a swift execution by pistol-shot to the back of the head.

and on the hillside right over here next to us. All of the sudden there's an explosion right behind me, damn near lifted my helmet off, you know, big concussion like this, and I thought Jesus Christ they've got a mortar round. . . . of course somebody behind hollers, "Corpsman!!" – well they didn't say "corpsman." Baumgartner was his name. We were told not to call "corpsman." Call them his name because the gook would understand we have injured if they heard "corpsman." . . . so [the corpsman] came down with his assistant . . . and turned out it wasn't a mortar round at all. They guy walking either behind me or the guy behind him had unloosened his pack when they said take five and leaned against the embankment and leaned right on a land mine . . . that was a KIA right there.⁸

The NKPA defenders offered only a smattering of mortar and machine gun fire initially. The ability of units in this area to maneuver was severely hobbled by the terrain and mud, and even forward movement was difficult. Because of toughening resistance, however, the 1st Battalion KMC (1/KMC) received orders in the early afternoon (1445) to pass through 3/KMC and continue the attack on Hill 924; 1026 would have to wait. Resistance increased, and troops bogged down by minefields were lucrative targets for enemy mortar and artillery fire.⁹

Similarly light resistance greeted 3/7 in their attack, but it increased steadily with the advance. Morning found 3/7 dug in east of Hill 793. George, How, and Item Companies had moved out by 0600, but had to halt when an "adjacent unit" failed to move out on schedule. The attack was not really underway until 1005. They attacked Hill 702 through heavy minefields and at least one barrage from artillery and mortars. The First Battalion, 7th Marines helped in the assault from its position east of the river with supporting fire from mortars (Hills 660 and 516). By 1430, 3/7 was "receiving heavy

⁸ Ralph B. Steele Interview Transcript, Library of Congress.

⁹ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 7; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178.

small arms and automatic weapons fire from well constructed bunkers on the objective.” A more detailed description of this action broken down by companies is as follows.¹⁰

Item Company was to lead the attack against Regimental Objectives B and C (See Map # 18 for locations). How Company was to move out to the Battalion Observation Post (OP), prepared to support Item's attack. George Company was to send one reinforced platoon to Objective A “to protect the battalion's left flank and keep the two converging streams under observation.” Small tributaries of the Soyang-gang, each about 2,000 meters long and not visible on the maps included in this study, ran west to east just to the north and just to the south of Tonpyong.¹¹

How Company reached the OP at 0824 and Item Company was slogging through slippery mud towards Objective B and making difficult progress because of it. (George Company's platoon would not reach its post until 1115). One platoon reached Objective B at 0850, but had to halt and wait while the rest of the company caught up. So far, the only enemy in sight were on Objective C. By 1000, Item was just to the north of Objective B and less than 200 yards from the eastern edge of Objective C. Item's CO (Commanding Officer), 1st Lt Richard L. Shell, called in artillery preparations on Objective C that peppered the target at 1025 with a twenty minute barrage.¹²

As the last round was on its way, Item surged forward against Objective C. Simultaneously, How Company began to move up behind Item to occupy Objective B, and 1/7 stepped up its supporting fires to harass the enemy on high ground to 3/7's right. Within ten minutes Item began to receive heavy AW (automatic weapons) fire from

¹⁰ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 8; Seventh Marines “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 6; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178.

¹¹ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, “Historical Diary,” August 1951, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

enemy bunkers, but continued advancing west along the ridge towards Objective C with one platoon maneuvering along the southern slope (the left flank of the objective since Item was facing west). Soon Lt Shell reported that they had encountered heavy AP mine fields covered with MGs. He pulled back to near Objective B while calling in a heavy dose of 4.2 inch and 81mm mortar rounds to try and explode the mines. He then asked for artillery on Objective C but none was forthcoming. It was now 1148. To make up for the lack of artillery, the mortars deluged the objective with another barrage and Item bounded forward under this cover while the shells were still in the air. By 1215, the company was again being raked with enemy bullets. Apparently the mortars had not done the job on the minefield. Shell called in at 1225 to report that his maneuver elements could not advance due to mines and AW fire that kept his men from clearing them. Item again pulled back to near Objective B.¹³

The NKPA's were clever. This minefield was one made up of 82mm mortar shells wired to hand grenades to activate the mortar shells. A burp-gun armed soldier was emplaced in ambush on each side of the mine-ridden trail to keep the Marines from clearing it, as well as to cut anyone down who might escape the mines. Too, an estimated sixty enemy resided on this portion of the hill in "new heavily fortified pillboxes."¹⁴

By this time, 1250, How Company was about 500 yards to the southwest advancing towards Objective B. Fifty minutes later, Item again received orders to "maneuver through the mines and press the assault." Within ten minutes Item was once

¹³ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 8-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

more within reach of enemy bullets and taking heavy fire, but this time they were taking the right flank of the objective, the north face.¹⁵

Meanwhile, there was a tense situation for George Company's 1st Platoon (George-1) on Objective A. An unidentified squad-sized patrol was before their positions in a stream bed, lugging along a mortar. George-1 moved to intercept and set up an ambush, but it turned out they were just a lost element of the KMCs. No shots were fired.¹⁶

Item was still in the thick of combat. At 1412 it had pushed to the crest of their objective but was still in the middle of a hot firefight. The Battalion OP, controlling the artillery fire to Item's front, received word at 1430 to lift the fire so Item could advance further west along the ridge and clean up the enemy resistance. By 1525, the company had cleared the objective down to the saddle at the western end (between it and Hill 924) and began to reorganize and dig in.¹⁷

Just then How Company was told to advance on Hill 602, Objective D. However, the order was canceled forty minutes later by regiment before How was yet in sight of any enemy, in favor of consolidating a line of positions from Item Company on the west to 1/7 (visual contact rather than actual) on the east.¹⁸

The order then went out that the next day would be mostly patrolling for 3/7, though the enemy would have other ideas as things turned out. Item was to patrol each of the three finger ridges of Objective Charlie; How was to send a squad towards 602;

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

and George was to patrol from a pass near Hill 755 to the head of the most northern of the two west-to-east tributaries bracketing Tonpyong.¹⁹

While 3/7 was engaged, patrols from 1/7 east of the river ran into a two-hour firefight. The patrol withdrew at 1200 to call artillery on the enemy location. A 1/7 FO (forward observer) also had opportunity to call in artillery on an enemy battalion moving off Hill 673. The results were reported as excellent.²⁰

Casualties were not light that first day in the division, 3 KIA and 57 WIA (KMC and USMC both together). Among the wounded, however, was the KMC regimental commander, Colonel Kim Dae Shik (who would become Commandant of the KMC by 1958), and a U. S. Marine advisor assigned to the KMCs, 2dLt James McGoey. They had hit a landmine on a trail running south from Hill 924. It was raining and the two were returning from a visit to the front lines that afternoon. The commanding officer (CO) of 3/KMC, Colonel KIM Yun Gun, temporarily took command until he could be replaced by Colonel KIM Dong Ha, the executive officer of the 1st KMC. Even with this incident, the attack of the regiment was not delayed the following day, though it had to pull back to Hill 793 to regroup. About two thirds of the KMC casualties were from land mines. Enemy casualties were 129 counted KIA, 218 estimated KIA, and 233 estimated WIA with 14 prisoners taken.²¹

These division casualty numbers seem distant and inhuman on the page, but they were people. Garlen Selmyhr described the first time he saw a dead Marine.

The first time I saw a dead Marine it was when two casualties from another company were brought down the ridge line and place near my CP. They were on

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁰ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 8.

²¹ Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, 22 December 1958, page 2; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 8.

stretchers and covered with ponchos. Both ponchos were bloody. They were about six feet away, and as I saw them, the wind lifted one corner of one of the ponchos and revealed a black leg. That surprised me, as I had assumed both were Caucasian. Here were two Marines. Both paid the ultimate price in service to their country and their Corps. Both were receiving the same care, respect, and attention. The blood on both ponchos was red, and I realized then that the blood of a black Marine was as red as that of a white Marine.²²

One stroke of good luck was had this day. The enemy NKPA II Corps, when hit, had been in the midst of turning over its sector to the NKPA III Corps. Thus the defense was not as organized as it might have been otherwise. However, the enemy on Yoke Ridge was estimated to number two regiments of 1,500 men each. The enemy in 3/7's zone was thought to be the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment, 1st Division, III NK Corps.²³ (See Chart # 14)

Positions for the night were as follows. Item Company was on Objective C; How Company was 1,000 meters east of Objective B with its lines extending south to follow the line of the river; George-1 remained on Objective Able, while the other two platoons stayed in the vicinity of Hill 755.²⁴

Day Two: September 1

September 1 began with 3/KMC passing through 3/7 (near Hill 602) to take up a position that flanked Hill 924 to its east. From here it was to renew the attack from a northeasterly direction along the ridgeline running from Hill 602 to 924. Simultaneously in a converging attack, 1/KMC assaulted from Hill 924's southeast. Resistance was far

²² Transcript of Interview with Garlen L. "Spike" Selmyhr by Lynrita (Sommer) Brown, 2000. www.koreanwar-educator.org/memoirs/selmyhr_spike/index.htm. Website last consulted April 2007.

²³ X Corps, "Command Report," September 1951, 8-9; 1 Mar Div, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 8; Third Battalion, Seventh Marines "Historical Diary," August 1951, 8.

²⁴ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 9-10.

from light. Heavy losses ripped through the ranks from mines, mortar fire, and machine gun fire from mutually supporting, fortified enemy positions.²⁵

For 3/KMC, the attack was made with one company circling to take 924 in the east flank while the rest of the battalion “drove straight up the ridgeline from the south.” Unlike August 31, it was not raining and the supporting arms assigned the KMCs were able to be brought to bear more effectively. The enemy was dug in deep on the hill, and every ounce of firepower, from supporting arms to the infantry, was needed to blast them out of their positions. In addition, the KMCs put together a special raiding unit with flame-thrower operators (the first use of this weapon by the KMC Regiment, though the NKPA had had them in 1950). The flame-throwers poured liquid fire into bunkers and helped silence enemy MGs in critical locations. This allowed for a much more successful advance in the afternoon.²⁶

One 3/7 Marine observed the KMC attack:

The Korean Marine Corps, or KMC as they were known, moved through our position and up the dogleg ridge to the left. They were moving up the ridge to higher ground to attack a hill in the distance. We could see the hill about a mile away and it looked almost straight up and solid rock. The artillery shells and many air attacks with napalm had left the face of the hill barren. We realized that they had a very difficult battle ahead of them without cover or concealment. . . .

The KMCs continued to attack the big rock-faced hill a couple of times per day and they finally took the hill. They had many casualties and moved the dead and wounded down through our area. They would stop and show us their wounds and where bullets had hit their rifles. They were a fierce-fighting, proud group that wanted to live up to the U. S. Marines. They had shown us they were every bit as good as our outfit.²⁷

Another Marine with the 7th Marines remembered one cultural difference between the two groups of Marines, U. S. and Korean:

²⁵ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 5.

²⁶ Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, 22 December 1958, page 3; Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 152.

²⁷ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

I saw my first wounded which happened to be South Korean Marines and another thing I thought about is . . . our expression of pain has got a lot to do with culture . . . because I don't think we hurt any less and they hurt any more, but the Koreans seem to really let you know he was hurt. He screamed and shrieked and when wounded Marines came off the line, very [cool] . . . and we weren't trying to be tough guys. It was just that our culture doesn't apparently do that
[Beyond cultural differences, it would take some investigation, but maybe the Korean Marines did not receive morphine or did not have it available like the U. S. troops did.]²⁸

By early evening, elements of 3/KMC were within 200 yards of their goal, but the objective was not attained until 2100 that night (an enemy counterattack would recapture the hill before dawn). The 5th Marine regiment was ordered to give 2/KMC opportunity to assist its fellow KMC battalions; 3/5 relieved 2/KMC on the Kansas Line the evening of September 1 so this additional battalion could help the KMC Regiment make better progress in its attacks the next day. An air drop of twenty AF cargo planes resupplied the KMCs with rations and ammunition during the daylight hours.²⁹

It was a hard day for 3/7 as well. The Official History, as well as the 1st Mar Div Historical Diary for September, 1951 both state the Marines resumed the previous day's assault against Hill 702, defended by the enemy in battalion strength. That is not the case for 3/7. It began with patrolling. Item sent out a squad-sized patrol at 0800. It immediately encountered intense enemy fire and was held up near Item's left flank before it had even really begun. This patrol took fire for thirty minutes, then a enemy attack thirty men strong hit Item's right front. Almost immediately thereafter an NKPA platoon hit the center of the company's lines. The Marines opened up a storm of .30 caliber fire searing across its firing lanes, triangles of death formed between each man's aiming stake. The enemy attack broke and faded away after only ten minutes of

²⁸ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress.

²⁹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178, 181; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5-6.

withering steel and flame. At 0900 the NKPA began to hit Item's center with mortar shells and SA fire. Five minutes later, How Company reported that the enemy was massing on Hill 602, and then was itself hit by a large attack about two hundred yards north of Hill 702, near Objective B, under support of heavy MGs and a deluge of 82mm mortar fire. Simultaneous to this, the Marines began to shell 602 with their 4.2 inch mortars (called "four deuces") and artillery lasting until 0945, when an airstrike of two P-51s (Mustang fighter-bomber plane) and two Ads (Douglas "Skyraider" plane) lit into the same hill.³⁰

Item Company took another assault in its left flank at 1025 with enemy SA fire even hitting it from the rear. An enemy element had circled around the left flank to get behind Item. Item promptly sent a squad to take care of this harassing force, which soon found and killed two North Koreans. That was the last of fire from behind this day. The enemy attack blunted on Item's hard lines, but these NKPAs did not yet retreat. The fighting devolved into a short-range torrent of fire ripping both directions with the NKPA soldiers lying prone on the face of the hill just short of Marine emplacements. By 1045 there were thirty dead Koreans strewn about Item's left-flank position, some corpses even in the Marine lines and foxholes, looking like piles of rags as much as anything else. Blood, pieces of equipment, smoking bodies, dirty bandages, steel ammo clips from M-1 rifles, and brass rifle casings were everywhere.³¹

The attack against How Company reached a crescendo about that same time. On the little hill just north of 702, none were left of the company's defenders but the dead and wounded. Thirty yards short of this hill, How Company held its ground along the

³⁰ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6; Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2.

³¹ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2.

ridgeline. First Lt Dwight A. Young was the Company CO. He “pulled his right flank platoon in and counterattacked to retake the thirty yards of ground.” The Marines swept to the top of the little hill to their front at 1055 and sent the NKPAs thereon into retreat, broken and bloodied.³²

To the west of 602 about 400 meters, Item Company spotted another enemy group massing at 1115 and called in artillery. Rounds screamed in and pounded the NKPA formation apart. Ten minutes later, however, How Company was again the recipient of an attack. The screaming NKPA soldiers made it within a few feet of the Marine fox holes before being cut down. How Company had reorganized itself just in time. POWs stated that their attack had consisted of 500 soldiers backed by no less than eight heavy MGs and multiple 82mm mortars.³³

George Company moved forward at noon to reinforce the hard-hit How Company. Soon after, an FO from Item Company broke up another group of about 100 enemy sneaking up a draw in front of Item’s positions, with a pre-registered artillery concentration that hit right on top of these troops and tore them to shreds. George Company reached How after 1400 as Item again fought off another twenty-minute attack, which was reinforced by another thirty enemy ten minutes later. Soldier after soldier fell to Marine fire, lying in heaps about the area. The NKPA continued to fight, continued to do their job, and called in mortars on Marine positions whenever they were not attacking. Yet again, the communists hurled themselves at Marine lines for another fifteen-minute firefight just before 1600.³⁴

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2-3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

One Marine described an interesting aspect of the NKPA forces opposing the 1st Mar Div:

We were getting our position in good condition to defend it against whatever troops came at us. One of the men spotted North Korean women on another hill. They set up knee mortars, fired at us, then moved to cover. The Japanese in the Second World War had developed and used knee mortars. I was surprised to hear that women were fighting on the front lines. We had heard of women carrying supplies for the North Korean Army, but not of their being involved in combat. . . .³⁵

At the same time, another flight of four planes came in for a strike at the ridgeline between How and Hill 602, an enemy route of approach. This was followed by a second four-plane strike at 1730 at enemy troops in the open and against some bunkers on 602. Yet another strike followed, again on 602, at 1840.³⁶

The positions of 3/7 for the night were much the same as the night before. The Battalion OP was just southwest of Hill 516 along with the forward ammo dump. Fox 2/7 was put under 3/7's operational control at 1100 that morning. Its position that night was on Talsal Lyang, a village south of the LD, for two platoons. The other platoon was on Objective A.³⁷

NKPA troops had attacked from Hill 602 with as many as 500 men. Artillery fire and the airstrikes ended the enemy's immediate enthusiasm for counterattack at dusk, but little sleep could be had because of enemy mortar and artillery harassment.³⁸

That night, the orders went out for the following day. The Marines of 3/7 were to attack and seize 602 with George Company, the least-hit company, in the assault. H-hour was set for 0700. The Marines of 1/7 were again to patrol and support 3/7 with fire.

³⁵ Oral Memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

³⁶ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 1.

³⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178-179; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5-6.

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (2/7) again stayed on the Kansas Line, except for Fox Company.³⁹

On September 24, 1951, Sergeant Naun Juarez wrote to a corpsman that had been in his platoon about the Battle at Yoke Ridge:

I just thought of writing and report to you how the Co. is doing. Did we step into shit? I thought I would never get out alive. We jumped off on the attack on the 31st of Aug. Item Co took its objective by 5 pm. How Co was to pass by Item Co and take ours, but it was too late to do it so we just tied in with Item Co. All night long we had incoming mail. Mortars and artillery. We had some casualties, not too many. But next day on Sept 1st all Hell tore loose at us. About 2 Bns [battalions] against 2 beat up Cos [companies].

Item Co had really been clobbered the day before.

At about 0900 Sept 1st the 2nd Platoon was ordered to send 2 fire teams to the 1st Platoon which was badly shot up after stopping the gooks counterattacks time after time. At about 1000 I was ordered to take my entire squad and reinforce the 1st Platoon again. So we went in and joined the party.

Things were really popping. A lot of excitement just like the 4th of July. At 1300 I was told to pull 3 men out of anywhere and plug up the gap on the left flank. I took Brodeur, Lawrence, and myself. I couldn't afford to take anyone else and leave a wide gap so I went myself. We were there about five minutes and mortars and artillery came in. Brodeur got hit in the leg and Lawrence got it in the gut. I got pieces on my back and on my left butt. Of the guys that you know that got hit were O'Brien, Noriega, Brodeur, Darchuck, and myself. We had two killed in action. Berryman and Kline. . . .

. . . I got it the 1st of Sept All this took place up North east Central front, the famous "Punchbowl." The darn mountains get bigger every time. You are lucky you got out of here. The gooks are making use of their mortars and artillery. . . .⁴⁰

A Marine machine gunner of 3/7, PFC James F. Yates, took a piece of shrapnel in the chest from an enemy grenade. This would have been fatal, but Yates found to his awe that the piece had lodged in the New Testament he carried in his breast pocket.

This boded much religious significance to him, as the piece marked Luke 18:33:

"Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life

³⁹ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3.

⁴⁰ Letter of Sergeant Naun Juarez to "Ollie," September 24, 1951, printed in Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 278-279.

shall preserve it." Yates already had one Purple Heart from action in May, but this experience made him unafraid in combat. "I suppose everyone is scared in combat, but I don't think I'll be afraid any more of being killed."⁴¹

A Marine with How 3/7, Jon Charles Genrich, recalled one hilltop action at Yoke Ridge that day:

We . . . were told to disperse down along the hillside. Some of the company . . . moved on up the path . . . We spread out and the new men looked at each other as if to ask, "What is going on ahead of us?" We sat there on the hillside for about a half hour and then heard small arms fire and what sounded like mortars up ahead.

. . . The Sergeant said, "Move out on the run up the hill. They have overrun our troops." We moved up fast, ready to fire, and when we arrived we saw only two North Koreans left on the left flank. It seemed everyone fired at once and they went down. We saw more bodies lying around. The Marines were scattered out in shallow holes and seemed to be holding their own. The machine gun had been overrun and the gunner and assistant gunner were dead.⁴²

Genrich related what the Marines of his squad did to prepare when they gained a hilltop on Yoke Ridge:

The first thing we did was set up a perimeter for the next wave of the North Koreans. Big Mac asked me how my arm was and I said that it was pretty good. He threw me a sack of hand grenades. We later heard that Big Mac had beat down the first wave by throwing several grenades and rushing the Koreans firing until he had killed five or six. . . . The hole behind the gun [Genrich was an ammo carrier for a machine gun] wasn't deep enough with the two dead Marines still in the hole. Big Mac told Richard to help throw their bodies up along the gun for protection so they would have more room to get behind the gun. . . . Big Mac said, "They're dead men and nothing is going to hurt them anymore."⁴³

The enemy was not long in seeing the Marines' preparations had not been in vain. Genrich continued:

⁴¹ Undated Public Information Document with no author named, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, "Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952."

⁴² Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Before we had time to think or fully prepare, the next attack came at us. I was in a shallow hole about a foot deep and fifteen feet behind the gun. I raised up to fire my rifle but I couldn't see the enemy because of the terrain. . . . I grabbed the sack of hand grenades, dumped them out, and started throwing them over the edge of the hill into the trees. I threw the first grenade to the right, one straight ahead, and the last to the left like mortars. I felt this was my mortar fire and kept throwing until the grenades were gone. I heard Big Mac yell as he was firing the machine gun, "This is the most fun I've had since my grandmother got her tit caught in the wringer. . . ."

He had thrown grenades, fired his rifle to kill over half dozen North Korean, and had beat the last to death with his rifle butt. Some thought he should have gotten the Medal of Honor, but this requires an officer to write it up. They never seem to be around when one was needed. . . .

We had beaten them back the second time, which had been difficult since they had come out of thick trees and brush only 20 yards down the hill . . . they were difficult to see until they were almost on our position. The Company Commander called in artillery from the rear command post and the first round was short. The white phosphorous exploded on our location. Several hit my leg and burned right through my dungarees and into the leg. I grabbed at the phosphorous to pull or knock them off and my index finger was burned. (I had no fingerprint for several years afterwards.) I then remembered to grab dirt to smother the phosphorous. . . After the artillery found the range they pounded them for what seemed like fifteen minutes. We stayed ready for the next attack, but it never came.⁴⁴

Patrols of 1/7 and the Division Reconnaissance Company both saw some combat, the latter screening the northeast quarter of the Punchbowl. The AT (Anti-tank) company of the 7th Marines was attached to Baker Company 1/7, of which one platoon included Lt. Eddie LeBaron, the future star quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys. It too saw action. "There was one particular bunker [on Hill 602] that we fired at all day [with a 75mm recoilless rifle]. Artillery and air strikes were called in to help. Again and again we destroyed this bunker; and again and again, the North Koreans rebuilt it. By sundown it had been leveled to the ground, and we could no longer see it. That night the North

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Korean rebuilt it again: When the sun came up, the bunker was back on that hilltop as good as new.”⁴⁵

The 3/7 Marines dug in deeper that evening to meet whatever might come.

Marine Jon Charles Genrich remembered:

We started to dig deeper foxholes and clear some of the brush in front of our positions. While we were digging, I noticed my Squad Leader Murph sitting down and digging around a large dud mortar round. I yelled over at him. “Isn’t that dangerous?” He just kept hitting the ground around the dud and never looked up. I said something several times, then tapped him on the shoulder and took the entrenching tool. I told a medical corpsman and he and an officer came over and took the squad leader away to talk to him. . . .

[Later, Murph came back.] I was glad to see my squad leader back. It was explained to me that he had been worried about his younger brother at home. I understood that he hadn’t heard from him in awhile and he felt responsible for his brother. It was common for servicemen to worry about family, wife, or friends back home more than to be concerned about themselves.⁴⁶

The darkness was the NKPA’s friend. It hid its troops from observation and the accurate, observed, effects of UN supporting arms. Like the CCF, they favored night attacks. In the middle of the night September 1-2, NKPA soldiers assaulted the KMC unit atop Hill 924 and drove them from their positions.⁴⁷

That same day, the Commanding General of FMFPac visited General Thomas and the division. He and Thomas discussed the CAS problem as well as the fighting of the 2nd Inf Div to the west, which fought to secure “Bloody Ridge.” He would remain in Korea until September 12, but not all of his time would be with 1st Mar Div. He visited

⁴⁵ Oral account of PFC Troy Hamm, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 294; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6; Oral account of PFC Troy Hamm and note, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 294.

⁴⁶ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

⁴⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 178-179; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 5-6.

Vice Admiral Turner C. Joy, COMNAVFE (Commander Naval Forces Far East), and the 1st MAW, as well, both to talk about CAS.⁴⁸

Casualties for the 1st Mar Div for September 1 as of 1800, were: 3 KIA and 29 WIA (not counting the KMCs – these losses were kept separate because it was American casualties that really concerned EUSAK and UNC, as well as Washington and the folks back home). That U. S. Marine losses were so low relative to the high number taken by the enemy is indicative of the costly nature of the enemy attacks. That U. S. Marine losses were low at all is remarkable given the intensity of the fighting. KMC losses were: 18 KIA, 55 WIA, and 2 MIA: a total of 21 KIA, 84 WIA, and 2 MIA for the division as a whole that day. There were 72 counted enemy dead, and 218 estimated KIA, for a total of 290 KIA. The number of WIA for the enemy was estimated at 231.⁴⁹

Day Three: September 2

Dawn brought the 1st KMC back against Hill 924 with a vengeance. Artillery from 1/11 (1st Bn, 11th Marines) deluged the hill with 1,682 rounds of 105mm shells (that many were fired before 1800 that evening), and the KMC had their hill back before noon with 1/KMC and 3/KMC on the objective. But the day's work was not yet done for the regiment. The 2nd KMC battalion, fresh from reserve, passed through its brother battalions and attacked towards its regiment's next objective, Hill 1026. This would be the final part of Objective Three.⁵⁰

Morning saw 3/7 repulse an enemy counterattack on its positions. Enemy troops started infiltrating into Item's left flank at 0700. The avenue of approach here had been

⁴⁸ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 42. See chapter on Close Air Support.

⁴⁹ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6.

⁵⁰ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 179; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6-7.

well zeroed-in with artillery and the FO let them have it. The shells screamed in like freight-trains and burst bits of North Korean soldiers everywhere with earth-shaking crashes. The soldiers hit by this concentration were so torn apart that the Marines couldn't even tell where one man ended and another began to get an accurate count of the enemy KIA. They had to estimate, and their conclusion was that at least twenty more NKPA bodies had been added to the carnage around Item's left flank. In addition, Item's Marines noted seven enemy KIA in its area they had downed with rifle fire. That made at least twenty-seven enemy KIA in this one brief firefight with zero casualties on the Marine side. The NKPA WIA numbers were unknown.⁵¹

Meanwhile, George 3/7 made ready for its attack. The Marines of 3/7 could not see the eastern slope of 602 from its lines, but 1/7 could, so at 0800, 1/7 called in artillery support on the east side of the objective. In addition, 1/7 sent Baker Company to a position just east of the river from 602 to bag any enemy who might try and flee when George Company assaulted.⁵²

The enemy was not done with Item Company, however. At 0923 more NKPAs were spotted heading for its left flank along the same body-strewn trails as before. The artillery was firing on 602, so this time the organic weapons of Item had a turn: 60mm mortars, light MGs, M-1 rifles, and BARs spat flame and steel into the foe before he could even mass for his attack. This assault was dispersed.⁵³

After 3/7 repulsed the enemy counterattack, (at 0900) George Company set out to attack Hill 602 (Division Objective Two) with How Company supporting the movement of George with its mortars and machine guns, supplemented by the Battalion Weapons

⁵¹ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Company's heavy machine guns (HMGs), fired in battery over the heads of the assaulting infantry.⁵⁴

At this point, 0935, the artillery from 1/7 stopped on 602 but 4.2 mortars and 155mm and 105mm howitzers from 3/7's direct artillery supports continued. George Company had stepped off earlier at 0900 past the little hill How Company had fought so hard for the day before just north of Hill 702. The area was dense with timber, offering George some concealment as it moved. An hour and a half later, George was still approaching through these trees and Baker 1/7 reported it was in position and ready for action. George could not be seen by other Marine units, but How Company had a good radio link and kept tabs on its progress. How was still on 702 at this point and directing the supporting fires against 602. The artillery was estimated to have demolished four enemy bunkers by 1054 with the 155mms.⁵⁵

Just then, the enemy livened things up with yet another attack on Item Company, this time the attack was at least a company of NKPA in strength. A storm of mortar and MG fire sprayed across Item's front with the main push again targeting the left front. In addition there was a simultaneous attack on the left flank from the ridgeline leading towards Hill 924. Item kept its 60mm mortars popping amid the frontal force while it brought artillery with heavy "battery-three" rounds down on the flanking approaches. The enemy plunged head-long through this exploding steel, careless of his losses. The Marine riflemen gritted their teeth and filled the enemy soldiers with bullets and grenade fragments. The attacks withered away by 1154, but Item had taken many casualties. Many Marines had minor wounds and just bandaged them up and kept on with their

⁵⁴ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 179; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6-7; Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4.

⁵⁵ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4.

duties, but there were 2 KIAs, and 6 WIAs required stretcher evacuation. Even then, the enemy troops were still seen near the left flank. How Company got the order then to send a platoon to reinforce Item.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, George Company was in position to observe 602. There were many enemy milling about on the hill, probably preparing to launch another attack on Marine lines, so the advance held up long enough for How Company to deluge the objective with more supporting fire called in from the 11th Marines. Every NKPA killed before the assault by artillery, CAS, or mortars was one less to deal with in close combat and one less to fire on the advancing infantry; 105mm artillery, 4.2 inch mortars, and an airstrike consisting of napalm and rockets pounded into Hill 602. A little later, a second air strike smote the hills across the river to the north of 602.⁵⁷

Soon after, at 1323, George Company noticed an enemy company approaching its left flank through a draw. These Marines doused the Koreans with 81mm mortar fire, then turned 155mm artillery from off of 602 to hose this new threat. The troops in the draw withdrew to the northwest. George Company was ready to assault at 1350 from the treeline 100 yards away from 602's crest. Captain Robert C. Hendrickson, the CO, ordered nine rounds of 4.2 mortar fire from each tube in support. "As the last of these 36 rounds were in the air and with the enemy seeking cover, two platoons assaulted in a charge that carried over the top of Hill 602 and completely surprised the enemy." The company had concealed itself in the trees before the attack and the NKPAs on 602 did

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁵⁷ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5.

not even realize they were there. The defenders were “completely” routed from the hill, with few friendly losses. The objective was secure at 1430.⁵⁸

As one fire team of Marines approached an enemy bunker, a Communist hand thrust forward from the aperture holding a grenade. “Presento,” said the NKPA soldier within. The Marines thought the word meant “present” as in the command “present arms.” One Marine obliged with an armed hand grenade, followed by others from the rest of the fire team lobbed into the bunker. After the explosion, the Marine muttered, “presento to you too, bub,” and continued with the assault.⁵⁹

POWs taken reported that seventy soldiers were defending 602 at the time, but Hill 602 belonged to the U. S. Marines now. That meant that two of the division objectives were in hand, Objective One and now Objective Two. All that now remained was Objective Three, Hill 1026.⁶⁰

In support of 3/7, 3/11 laid down 1,400 rounds of artillery. The 1st Battalion, 11th Marines similarly fired 1,682 rounds in direct support of the 1st KMC. (The 11th Marine Regiment, the division’s artillery regiment, was also reinforced during this battle by the 780th, 937th, and 196th Field Artillery Battalions of the Army. One battalion of artillery was usually assigned one regiment of the division to directly support. The total amount fired for the last twenty-four hours by all these artillery units in total was 8,400 rounds. That exceeded the “Van Fleet Day of Fire,” a prescribed amount of shells to be fired each day whether targets existed or not, by 40 percent.) It took the repulse of three

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ Undated Public Information Document with no Author Named, National Archives.

⁶⁰ Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 5; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6-7.

attempts to push 3/7 off its objective by company-sized enemy assaults to convince the NKPA to cease contesting Hill 602 that afternoon and night.⁶¹

All through the fighting, ammo bearers struggled to keep the front lines supplied. The North Koreans, however, had the Marine supply routes registered for accurate mortar fire. PFC Troy Hamm of the 7th Marines AT Company (one platoon of 75mm Recoilless Rifles was attached to 3/7 for the assault) remembered:

One Day after many trips [to bring ammo up to the lines], I was very weary. The North Koreans began to hit our path to the supply point with mortars. I was knocked down by the concussion. When I picked myself up, I discovered a hole in my hand. I wrapped the wound and continued down the hill to pick up more ammo. The enemy fired on us the whole way. At the resupply point I smelled exploded powder [cordite?] and an odor that was new to me. An incoming round had made a direct hit on one of the guys, and pieces of him were scattered over the area.⁶²

Fox 2/7, at 1600, moved up behind Item and How 3/7 to bolster the line.

While 3/7 went through the preceding events, 2/KMC had battled towards Hill 1026. It was still 800 yards away when night fell. That night the enemy probed the Marine lines at the front. Even the 5th Marines back on the Kansas Line saw some activity that night.⁶³

The S-3 (Operations Officer) of 2/5, Major Gerald P. Averill, and the Battalion Commander, Lt Col Houston Stiff, observed the 7th Marines in the attack. Their conclusions would help 2/5 in its own attack later in the month. In addition, “the heavy casualties taken recently by the 1st KMC Regiment from anti-personnel mines served as a warning to personnel of this battalion.” Averill’s opinion of the 7th Marines in the attack was that, though courage was not lacking, the unit had “lost considerable initiative

⁶¹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 179; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6-7; Third Battalion, Seventh Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 5.

⁶² Oral account of PFC Troy Hamm, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 295.

⁶³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 179; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6-7.

during the prolonged period of reserve . . .” resulting in “a loss of momentum which resulted in excessive casualties.” He also thought these Marines showed insufficient training. The effect of a reserve “letdown” was not confined to the 7th Marines. The CO of 2/5 also admitted that his battalion had had some increased inefficiency due to the period of reserve and rest. He ordered his companies to train hard to regain their cutting edge.⁶⁴

Casualties for the day were 5 KIA and 75 WIA in the 7th Marines, and 70 KIA or MIA, and 274 WIA for the KMCs. The enemy lost 460 counted KIA and 15 prisoners. Estimated enemy KIA numbered 609 with 345 WIA.⁶⁵

Division headquarters received orders for a new EUSAK plan called Plan Apache, that day. IX Corps was to seize a new phase line, Line Etna. This plan was to involve a task force composed of some elements from the Marine Division moving to ROK I Corps area and attacking north along the east coast from Kansong to Kobong-ni. The attack would be supported from the sea by NGF. The division was supposed to immediately start planning for the operation. Planning commenced, but Task Force Able (the executing force for the plan) was never formed because the plan was canceled farther up the chain of command from X Corps. The division was notified of the fact September 8.⁶⁶

Day Four: September 3

About this time, Ralph B. Steele arrived at the front with the 12th Replacement Draft:

⁶⁴ “Historical Diary,” of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 5, 15, 2, 23.

⁶⁵ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 42; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 7.

⁶⁶ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September, 1951, Operational orders and plans for this operation are in the appendices of the diary.

. . . the Marines were engaged in the east-central [area of Korea], which turned out to be a very beautiful area, mountainous, wooded, a lot like West Virginia. . . . We're in trucks, dusty ride . . . then we turned north. We're going over these mountain passes and so on and so forth. Finally—the only way you can tell you're climbing or going down is by hearing what the engine on the truck's doing, you know . . . of course we were facing each other, bouncing along. Suddenly there's brilliant, brilliant blue flashes on both sides of the truck in these rice paddies, and then out of these flashes are shrieks and, you know crashes and shrieks. Well, right away I knew I heard artillery, but if you hear a whistle or a shriek and then a boom it's coming in. When it goes boom and shrieks it's going out, well it still shook us up pretty good, you know and Jiminy Christmas. I look across, the guy across from me during one of these blue flashes, and we had been running like I said in the trucks and our faces are coated with dust. And there's rivers underneath both of his eyes. He's crying, you know, tears are coming out of both eyes. . . .

We stopped, turned out to be the regimental CP which had just been set up on a timbered slope and they took our weapons and ammunition away from us. Smartest thing in the world. You know, green people up there. And of course we weren't on line yet. We're just back from the line. Then the first time looked across at some ridges right over there and they were illuminated by flares, and I could hear pa pa, pa pa pa pa pa, pa, gun fire. Then it would be quiet for a while and then pretty soon ____ flare burst, float down and hear pa pa, pa pa pa pa pa. Then it dawned on me tomorrow night I'm going to be up there where the pas are going on . . . This is going to happen . . . I was still excited. Eager, but the main thing was I didn't want to let anybody down. That really bothered me, that I would in any way let anyone down.⁶⁷

The Marines of 3/7 had a short break from fighting. They spent the morning digging in to Hill 602 (a company-sized patrol base was set up there). The KMCs were not so lucky. They resumed the attack against 1026 at 0400 while it was still dark. The 7th Marines did provide them with some relief, however, because 2/7 was released from regimental reserve to take over the defense of Hill 924 from the 1st KMC.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress. Mr. Steele went on to analyze the phrase "shots fired in anger." "[They were not] fired in anger at all. We're all professionals. We don't kill the Chinese [or North Koreans] out of anger. We kill them out of professional . . . That's our job. We're professional people. The same with these artillerists. They're not firing at the [North Koreans] out of hate . . . they're on a firing mission."

⁶⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 179-180; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7.

The attack of the Korean Marines was apparently launched at the same time as that of the enemy, for 2/KMC in the advance ran head-on into a large number of NKPA who were also attacking. The situation was in doubt for almost four hours, but the enemy attack was repulsed and the KMCs dug in and regrouped on Hill 1026 (Division Objective 3). In the last push for possession of 1026, a rifleman of the 2nd platoon of 2/KMC's 5th company managed to infiltrate forward to silence a MG bunker with a grenade. At the same time, the leader of the 1st Platoon, Lt Son Jin Ch'on, who had led the assault and suffered from shrapnel wounds in over fifty places, bolstered the will of his men. He stood up, ignoring enemy fire, and raised a bloody right hand. "1st platoon assault!" he cried, and the Korean Marines made a successful final rush on the summit of the hill.⁶⁹

The NKPAs were not content to leave the fight yet. Another two hour fire-fight commenced when an enemy reinforced company attacked the KMCs shortly after noon. But in the end, the Korean Marine Regiment held its territory, even moving to take Hill 1055, 700 meters to the north of 1026. After that, 2/KMC moved west to occupy Hill 930 because it "had been added to Objective Three during the day."⁷⁰

Casualties for September 3 were: 9 KIA and 22 WIA for the 7th Marines, and 13 KIA, 55 WIA for the KMCs. Enemy losses that day were estimated to total 294 KIA, 280 WIA, and 10 POWs.⁷¹

Thus ended Phase one of the battle with Yoke Ridge in Marine hands by 1800 that night. The Marine attack had helped relieve enemy pressure on the 2nd Infantry Division

⁶⁹ Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 153; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8.

⁷⁰ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 180; Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 154.

⁷¹ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8.

and 5th ROK Division to the west. “The constant pressure which the Division had applied to the enemy on the Hays line proved beneficial to adjacent units on the left during the period. The 35th ROK Regiment, 5th ROK Division advanced unopposed from Kansas line positions to Hill 450 . . . in the northwest quarter of the Punchbowl, approximately 3,300 meters south of Hill 1026. Over on the western rim of the Punchbowl, the 2nd Infantry Division seized Hill 1181 . . . , approximately 4000 meters southwest of Hill 930, with only light resistance reported.” (See Map # 19) Casualties taken in the battle for the ridge amounted to 15 KIA and 128 WIA in the 7th Marines, and 95 KIA, 2 MIA, and 367 WIA among the KMCs. This was a total of 110 1st Mar Div KIA, and 495 WIA. Enemy losses were higher. Marines counted about 900 dead (estimates for KIA and WIA were 552 of the former and 756 of the latter) and took 50 prisoners. These are staggering losses when one considers a NKPA regiment in total numbered only 1,500 men (a Marine Regiment numbered more than twice that). The 3rd Regiment, 1st Division of the NKPA III Corps was shattered by the battle. It had to shift into reserve on the hill mass to the north while the 14th Regiment built up defenses along the same hill mass. It would not be possible for the North Korean to maintain a war with those kinds of losses and no reciprocal gains in territory (they had no “endless hordes” like the CCF). Soon, they would have to head back to the negotiating table along with their CCF brethren. However, the toughest fighting of the period for the U. S. Regiments of the 1st Marine Division was yet to come.⁷²

Jon Charles Genrich remembered how suicidal the enemy could be:

⁷² 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 180; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8, 31-32; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 42; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 180; Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 154.

We moved up to the Kansas Line for a couple of days and to bury a pile of Chinese [North Koreans?] that had a very ripe odor. They had been lying there for some time. I was reminded of late summer and the six hundred Chinese soldiers who had marched up a hill while tanks and machine guns fired on them. After it was all over, our troops discovered that the Chinese all had new uniforms and were sixteen or seventeen years old. They also had drugs on them and must have been stoned out of their minds. They never took cover or stopped marching until they were all dead.⁷³

As far as CAS went, requests for air strikes had been made almost two days in advance for this battle, but only 12 planes were given the missions by JOC (their emphasis was still on Operation Strangle). This did not include emergency requests made in the actual fighting, but those had their own problems. An example of how the intervening layers of bureaucracy complicated things also occurred in this fight. The 7th Marines requested emergency air support to break a heavy enemy counterattack, but the X Corps's intelligence officer on Byers's staff canceled the request. He didn't think there was really any counterattack going on. To the Marines on the line staring screaming North Koreans in the face over the length of a bayoneted rifle, this was an outrage and gross failure of the system to work to help them succeed in their mission.⁷⁴

In summary, the Marines had taken their objectives with hard fighting, but the ratio of casualties by far favored the UN forces. The Communists had lost valuable men, and territory as well. U. S. firepower and morale were superior and gave the Marines a distinct edge. Furthermore, they probably outnumbered the enemy on the ridge (though this cannot be absolutely determined without documents from the NK side). (See Map # 13 for the amount of ground gained.)

⁷³ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

⁷⁴ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 43. See chapter on Close Air Support.

CHAPTER 6

(PHASE TWO:
KANMUBONG RIDGE)

BLOOD FOR RIDGES

Close-in fighting decided the issue on every hill.

--1 Mar Div. *Historical Diary*
September 1951

Interim:
September 4-10

The division had to take some time out starting September 4 to move more ammunition forward. Narrow roads, mud, and enemy mines as well as a shortage of needed trucks caused the delay, and the fact that the division railhead was ninety miles to the rear did not help. It took six days to build up a big enough ammo dump nearer the front lines in order for the attack to resume, partly because of the “extraordinary” amount of artillery shells the Marines had used up in the fight. A reserve supply of ammo for at least ten days was needed (fifty to sixty trucks a day). This was because trucks would be needed to rotate 2,000 Marines home by 15 September. (So in the case of this battle, and at least in this one aspect, the rotation policy *did* interfere with combat efficiency.)¹

¹ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-48; Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 896; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 7. “In fact, the estimates for shells fell short of the actual expenditures, 24,000 tons (874,000 rounds) for X Corps in September 1951. Intelligence officers believed that X Corps would need every shell it could find.” --Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 43.

The division was very committed to keeping the rotation process consistent and dependable to ensure high front-line unit morale. Also, Marines did not have to spend their entire time with the division in a front line unit. Many who had been in a rifle company for a few months had the option of rotating to a rear area job.²

Up at the actual front, however, there were no roads. The Korean laborers attached to each unit, a few hundred per infantry battalion, had to haul ammo and supplies to the Marines on "A-frame" packs. These Koreans were part of the Korean Service Corps (KSC). It was a half day trek by foot from the typical battalion supply point. Helicopter and air drops supplemented this system. However, "resupply by helicopter could be had only in emergencies and when the regular supply routes were either exhausted or not trafficable."³ (See Photo # 2)

Throughout the interim period, action occurred at night in the form of enemy attacks on Marine positions. In addition, mortar and artillery fire hit both at the front and in rear areas, so the period was anything but quiet.⁴

Plans were already being made for a second phase of the attack. It would be necessary to seize the ridges to the north of Yoke, because the ground there commanded that already taken, and to inflict greater casualties on the North Koreans in that sector. This ridge-mass was also important because a foothold there would allow UNC to hold the enemy in check on the ridges branching off of the hill-mass and block

² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 181; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7; Burton Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 306.

³ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 17; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 181; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7. For example, the 1st Marines at the close of August had 1,160 South Korean laborers attached -- 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," August 1951, 2.

⁴ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 1.

attacks south towards the Hays and Kansas Lines. D-day was to be 11 September.⁵
(See Map # 15)

The lull was tactically unfortunate because enemy units moved south into the sector to the division's front in force despite efforts by the Marines to, "patrol vigorously to the front to maintain contact with the enemy and prevent his reinforcing defensive positions." ("Spike" Selmyhr stated that he hated the term "maintain contact," "because what it really meant was that we moved toward their positions until we received fire, and then immediately withdrew to report where it came from.") One enemy unit was the 2nd NKPA Division, III Corps. This unit fortified Hill 673, though some fortifications already existed there, and put in many mortar emplacements. It would take flamethrowers, satchel charges, grenades, tanks, rifles, automatic-weapons, and Marine blood to get them out.⁶ (See Photo # 3)

Jack L. Cannon was one Marine who would have to help take it. "We had looked at this hill and wondered how long it would be before the division had to attack it and what it would be like. . . . [Soon] we were going to find out. The 91st Regiment of the 45th North Korean Army [Division, actually] would be annihilated here on 673 and Ridgeline 749, and we would lose a lot of good men in the process."⁷

The rifle companies spent the time patrolling forward of their lines and consolidating defenses on Yoke Ridge. If heavy resistance was encountered, like one patrol of the 7th Marines near Hill 673, the patrol would withdraw and call in supporting

⁵ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 180; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8, 11; Korean Institute of Military History, *Korean War*, Vol. 3, 154.

⁶ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 1; Garlen L. "Spike" Selmyhr Interview, 2000; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 182; "Tactical Study of Mandae-ri Area," July 1951, 6; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8-14.

⁷ Jack L. Cannon, "Attack on Hills 673 and 749," *Leatherneck* 72 (March, 1989), 23.

fire on the enemy position. In the patrols, accurate enemy 76mm fire was sometimes encountered (a high velocity, flat trajectory artillery piece with a noise like a banshee and a blast so loud one thought the world had shattered). The assaults to squelch the sources of that fire would be no picnic.⁸

Men were still wounded on patrols, though they were not technically part of the major “battle.” Jack L. Cannon was one such: “I was a sniper and on September 6 was covering for a patrol from “Baker” 1/7 that was pulling back. The heavy machine guns firing across the valley were Maxims on wheels. . . . The first of my three wounds—this one in my legs—was taken . . . from machine-gun crossfire between Hills 673 and 854.”⁹

Ralph B. Steele, now a BAR man with Fox Company, 2/7, described a patrol:

They sent a patrol out, and we were . . . high on a ridge. It’s all timbered and it goes down way down into a valley. It’s timbered, too. There’s a river down there and you can only occasionally see the river through the trees. The other side, those slopes were all enemy. We sent up a trail over there what they call a reinforced patrol. It’s probably a squad of guys which would be 12, 13 guys plus a machine gun section, so you got 20 some guys and then with the corpsmen you’re like 30 guys across the river. . . . and they got a big pack radio SCR300 with them. . . . everybody knows that patrol is out and it’s going to be a dangerous patrol because it’s one of those ridiculous orders I always thought was, it was a recon patrol but you keep moving towards the enemy until they shoot at you, and then you count the weapons and what caliber they’re shooting at you with. In other words, walk until somebody takes a shot at you and then lay down and count the weapons.¹⁰

Though the casualty numbers were usually small on such a patrol, the action could be very intense and still get a person very dead. Steele continued:

So anyway, they’re out there and . . . we start hearing pa pa pa , pa pa pa pa and the radio crackles on and it says that they’ve been taken under fire and they

⁸ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 180, 182; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8-14.

⁹ Jack L. Cannon, “Attack on Hills 673 and 749,” 24.

¹⁰ Transcript of Library of Congress Interview with Ralph B. Steele.

got a wounded. . . . More fire going on. Pretty soon we hear WIAs, they got KIAs. Now they got a critical situation. They're pinned down and they can't get out. . . . it was a different platoon than what I was a member of, but . . . they said "hey I need some volunteers." They were going to take a squad from that platoon to actually make the relief, but they was picking up casualties so fast they needed volunteers for litter bearers. . . . if I'm needed, I'm going. So my buddy and I grabbed a litter, and I would imagine another 15, 20 guys lead out down this trail clear down to the bottom and we . . . make a little perimeter down there and they were starting to withdraw.¹¹

Again, the reports are dry and may mention a patrol, even one that saw heavy action, in just a single sentence, and it is hard from that to know the human side of such a thing from them. Steele went on:

These guys were trying to get out from underneath this fire and they came over the lip. There's a river had made a horseshoe there and a bank on the far side – say the river is about 15, 20 inches deep and it was probably eight or ten yards wide. And the guys are coming over the far bank and they were just sweat stained and filthy dirty and their eyes were all bulging. I mean, they were terrified. These guys been getting . . . guys knocked down all around them. They came over to the edge, and I'm on the side of the bank and the sergeant in charge of that deal shouted down in general says, "We can use some help over there." Again, that's what I'm here for if I'm paid the big money . . . 80 some bucks a month. So I started across this damn stream and here again, you're a youth [a teenager]. I can hear—and bullets don't zing when they go by like they do in the movies. They snap. . . . They crack. . . . I heard snap, snap, snap. Well, I thought, "holy shit I'm being shot at." And I looked around, the other guys didn't seem to be paying much attention to it, and then right in front of me as I got to the other side and some bull rushes and _____ I saw two sparks, ptue ptue, you know, come up, and I remember I don't think that much about it I was so green . . .

¹²

There were also all the horrors and tragedies of war on such a patrol. Steele saw his first dead Marine that day:

. . . so I got over to the bank and here come a litter over this—by now they're just sliding down the bank and they were dusty and they were getting across the river and they were starting up the other side trying to get into safety . . . we were being shot at but they were in the horseshoe. They were shooting down the river. Here come a litter, and so a boy I eagerly reach up there for the litter and I bring it down and I could see the top of the guy's head was all sweat matted. Then the

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

_____ form by the canvas formed by the V of the weight of the body blood coagulated . . . ran out and ran on the grass . . . the bull rushes and whatnot. I thought, "Man, this guy is KIA." . . . I handed him by and I looked at his face, which I always try to avoid looking at somebody like that. He had taken four bullets right through the forehead from a burp gun and the face was intact but everything below the face was—the face just floated on a—kind of a crust, and I thought, "Jiminy Christmas," but, you know, again, if I was to see that today I would probably lose my supper. That was not my emotion. My emotion was, what is his parents doing this moment?¹³

Such was a patrol action for the Marines of 1951, an event huge in the life of those who survived it, but as much as completely forgotten by anyone else, especially the "history books."

One other patrol resulted in 8 MIA. However, most of thee men made it back to friendly lines.¹⁴

Jack C. Walker was one of those men:

One of the officers of Able Company Seventh Marines was briefing the men of the First Platoon.

"Men it is unlikely that you will see 'Charlie' [the enemy] today as it looks like he pulled back from 673 so your job will be to go up there and blow up his positions so he won't have positions to return to in case he decides to return. It should be a very routine mission. . . .

. . . my good friend always joked: Its hell to be on the "1st." anything! For example if a tough assignment came up in Regimental Headquarters, some general would say. "Let's give that to the First battalion!" Then the First battalion commander usually said. "Let's let Able Company have that one!" In the Company CP, they would say. "The first platoon can handle this!" Then, you guessed it! "Hey, first squad get that first fire team up here!" Well we think that is how our fire team was chosen for the point of that patrol . . . on that day in September.

We passed through Baker Company lines into "No Mans land." As we crossed the edge of the valley, there was a shallow stream off to your left and in the middle of the stream was the remains of a dead gook. I recall that unmistakable, sickening, sweet smell of death. You think of "Charlie" as being short normally but this guy was close to seven feet tall. His decaying flesh was black and they eye sockets empty. . . .

As the point arrived at 673, I was about 20 feet from a huge bunker and it appeared that there was nobody home. And then as the old saying goes, ALL

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ First Battalion, 7th Marines, "Historical Diary," Chronological Narrative for 7 September 1951.

HELL BROKE LOOSE!!! Machine gun fire was coming from all directions. Bullets whizzed around us cutting trees and branches . . . many times in the past I have asked myself; "why didn't you charge up that last 20 feet and throw a grenade thru [sic] the aperture of that bunker? . . . The answer I always get is: "Because I was scared out of my wits, you sill sonofabitch! . . ."

Anyway, I scrambled back a few yards and hit the deck. I lay on my back, pulled out, and lit a Camel cigarette. I listened to the bullets whizzing overhead. The firefight lasted about 2 Camels and the abruptly stopped. I waited another 10 minutes and started making my way back to the platoon. The platoon had left so I decided I would also and started down the hill toward the valley. Shortly two shots rang out towards me from 673. Then the voice (in gook English) yelled, "HALT!" I thought, "that sonofabitch missed me twice and now he wants me to HALT? Screw you Charlie! I was moving on! Pulling a Hank Snow! [A popular song at the time was *I'm Moving On* by Hank Snow.]

I ran on down the hill about 100 yards and stopped. . . . I felt sure they would come down looking for me so I lay down by a large tree and waited. I guess I was there about 15 minutes and during this time talked to God and Jesus, and anyone else who would listen! I made every promise I could think of I said "if you can only get me out of this mess I will go to church every Sunday and any other time you are open!"

. . . In a few minutes this gook appeared at the same spot I thought he would. . . . I didn't think he saw me because of his casual manner and was pretty sure that they thought I was already back in Corpus Christi, Texas by then! . . . I leveled my M1 at him and squeezed off a round which hit him in the stomach chest area and knocked him down screaming! A terrific feeling came of contentment ran through me and at that moment, the fear was gone. . . .

I reached the rice paddies, which were terraced down to the bottom of the valley like giant stairs. . . . Burp gun and machine gun fire followed me as I ran across the paddies. At each drop off, I would crawl one way or another 20 feet or so then take off running again. My helmet fell off in the middle on one of the paddies. That helmet had some letters from a girl in Corpus. As the machine gun fire increased, the importance of the letters decreased. I decided not to return for the helmet.

. . . It was almost dark now and I decided it might be better if I waited until morning to go up the hill. So far my day was going pretty good and I didn't want to end it by accidentally being killed by the U. S. Marines.

. . . At about 6 AM I thought it might be safe to make my way back up the hill. I yelled at Baker Company my name and company. It seemed like a long time but they finally signaled me to come up.

I got about half way up the hill and there was an explosion under me. When I opened my eyes I was standing in a huge hole! . . . I didn't have a scratch on me, but I didn't hear too well for a while. Maybe it was my talk with God and Jesus the day before. . . .

Baker sent two Marines down to guide me up the trail and through the minefield. I was taken to Lt. Eddie Le Baron for debriefing. . . .

[They] then asked me if I needed anything. I said yes I wanted to be baptized immediately! I felt that Baptizing was a lot like bulletproofing. . . .¹⁵

The interim period also saw Marines conduct cold weather training and survival classes. One officer in each company was appointed to be a “Cold Weather Officer,” in charge of making sure their unit was up to par in that area. The lessons of the Chosin Reservoir were not taken lightly in 1951.¹⁶

For the 1st KMC, the lull meant the establishment of a company outpost on Hill 752 atop a pass a half mile beyond Hill 930 of Yoke Ridge. To the KMC’s left was an ROK Division and the Korean Marines could hear the Communists hit this unit almost every night. Much work was done, too, on readying the Hays line, newly won, into a suitable defensive network of gun emplacements, trenches, barbed-wire, and bunkers.¹⁷

Total casualties for the interim period incurred and inflicted, were: 70 WIA, 24 KIA and 0 MIA for the KMCs; 116 WIA, 6 KIA and 2 MIA for the rest of the division; and an estimated 276 KIA for the enemy as well as 68 POWs. These were not light—though the 1st Mar Div looked on the period as an interim, the enemy continued his probing counterattacks and infiltration actions unabated. The losses were a stiff price for the necessary time to resupply artillery and ammunition, ready again for the offense, and strengthen the defenses on the Hays Line, but the terrain left little choice.¹⁸

In corps reserve, men of the 2nd Battalion First Marines received a pep-talk from their CO, LtCol Franklin B. Nihart, prior to moving north to join the rest of the division in combat. PFC Lyle Conaway remembered his remarks: “‘Men,’ he said, ‘I don’t know

¹⁵ First person account of Jack C. Walker, “A Day in September,” found at: http://www.1-7marineskorea.com/wereRemember/day_in_sept.htm. Website last consulted April 2007.

¹⁶ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 1, 13.

¹⁷ Interview with Colonel KIM Yun Gun, 22 December 1958, page 3-4.

¹⁸ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8-14.

where we're going, and I don't know when, but I'm sure it will be soon. One thing I do know, there will be a lot of Purple Hearts given out. . . ." There would be many Purple Hearts indeed.¹⁹

Day One: September 11

The next attack orders came early on 9 September in the form of Division OpnO 23-51. The 7th Marines were to commence a night attack at 0300 September 11 to take Hills 673 and 749, defended, it was thought, by approximately one NKPA regiment (1,500) men. These hills were designated Objectives Able and Baker. The 7th Marines was to also be sure and maintain contact with the 8th ROK Division to the east (which would seize Hill 854). The 7th Marines broke this order down into its own checkpoints to be seized consisting of Checkpoints 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. (See Map # 20) Checkpoint 1 was Hill 680; 2, Hill 673; 3, the southern part of Hill 749; 4, the big finger extending southwest from 749; and 6, the northern portion of 749's summit. The regiment was to then defend these positions until the 1st Marines had passed through.²⁰

After Division Objectives Able and Baker had been secured, the 1st Marines, fresh from X Corps reserve and returned to parent control, were to pass through and relieve the 7th Marines, and then seize a third objective on order, Division Objective Charlie, the ridgeline northwest of and including Hill 1052. The 7th Marines would then move into reserve at Wontong-ni, "not to be committed except on X Corps authority." Objective Dog, a fourth objective, was Hill 812. It would be the goal of the 5th Marines, but that

¹⁹ Oral account of PFC Lyle Conanway, Fox Company, 2/1, in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 295-96.

²⁰ Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Operation Order 14-51; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2, 13.

was a latter amendment to the present plan. All of this amounted to a three prong, “ridge-running” approach.²¹ (See Map # 21)

The 5th Marines was to leave a company on the Kansas Line and move to division reserve on the Hays Line (the newly won Yoke Ridge) behind the attacking 7th Marines. Meanwhile, the 1st KMC was to patrol the division left aggressively enough to distract the enemy on Division Objective Charlie. The 11th Marines was to move forward to support the attack of the 7th Marines with its artillery fires.²²

In support of the 7th Marines was the 1st Tank Battalion (organic to the 1st Mar Div), the 1st Engineer Battalion (also organic to the 1st Mar Div), and 3/11 in direct support. (General artillery support would be furnished by the rest of the 11th Marines and the 937th and 196th FABs (field artillery battalions). Company “C” of the 780th FAB added additional firepower to the later unit with its eight-inch howitzers, each of which fired a whopping 200lb shell packed with HE (high explosive).²³

The assault battalions had a daunting job ahead of them. They had to assault forward down into a narrow valley, cross a tributary of the Soyang River, and attack uphill against heavily fortified North Koreans who were not even a little bit eager to vacate their abode.²⁴

The night before D-day, the Navy chaplains attached to the various Marine units had services. Men prayed and prepared for battle. The morning dawned with mist and fog shrouding the valleys of the Taebaek Mountain Range. Marines, like in the Pacific,

²¹ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 13; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 11-12; Fifth Marines “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2.

²² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 182; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 14.

²³ Interview by phone between myself and Sergeant George Ellis, 780th FAB, Battery “C”, March 20, 2007, tape in my possession.

²⁴ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 14.

received the traditional breakfast of steak and eggs. The men were dirty. Due to a water shortage, it was very hard to keep clean on the lines and most bathing was done with a wet rag out of a helmet shell (or, occasionally, in the river, though there were warnings against this because of a fungus men could get in their ears). They got to change clothes only rarely, but their morale and dedication were high.²⁵

Spike Selmyhr, a platoon leader, received word that the father of one of his Marines had died. He called the lad aside and told him the news as gently as possible, and that they could not get him home for the funeral but would give him leave as soon as possible. The Marine replied, "Lieutenant, I will try not to let this bother me in doing my job tomorrow." Selmyhr reflected about this, "makes you realize what is meant by the term, 'Duty, Honor, Country.'"²⁶

Ralph B. Steele described the preparation fires for the attack:

. . . There's four guys in a hole and we got 25 percent watch. One guy awake at all times. . . . So I take my watch, get off watch and they're firing—we didn't know it then but preparing for tomorrow's attack. . . . Our artillery was firing. Shells weren't going over our heads because the target was quite a ways away. . . on the hill 673, 749, in that area. Ground's rumbling. It's a lot like the flashes and the rumble are a lot like a summer thunderstorm coming. . . .²⁷

Though warm or even hot and humid during the day (about 80 degrees most days), the Korean autumn was setting in with colder and colder nights so that frost even sometimes formed on the ground in the mornings. And the rain was still present. As unpleasant as this was to the individual Marine at the time, rain in tactical situations

²⁵ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14; Burton F. Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 343; Interview Transcript, Garlen L. "Spike" Selmyhr, 2000.

²⁶ Interview Transcript, Garlen L. "Spike" Selmyhr, 2000.

²⁷ Ralph B. Steele Interview Transcript, Library of Congress.

usually favors the attacker. It conceals movement and deadens sound thus facilitating surprise in an attack, the heavier the better. The same is true for fog.²⁸

One 7th Marines PFC, Troy Hamm, remembered his unit's move on the night of September 10-11:

We moved out early, wet and cold. All night long it had rained like I'd never seen before in my life. We sat in a wide open field all night. The old ponchos we wore funneled the water down our spines and out the seat of our utility trousers. To add to this misery, when we moved out, we carried the weight of our packs—a packboard with two cased 75mm RR rounds, a waterproof bag containing our winter and summer sleeping bags, three days' supply of C rations, and extra boots and utilities. I also carried an M-1 rifle and plenty of .30-cal ammo. The load was so heavy that when we stopped I had to position the packboard above me on the side of the hill so I could get under it enough to stand up without falling backward.

As we got closer to Hill 673, the sounds of firing grew louder. The roar of artillery—ours and theirs—and frequent air strikes marked our progress forward. By now I was so keyed-up, I forgot the weight of my pack.

Late in the day, five of our M26 tanks came up and supported us. Just their appearance and the noise they made boosted our morale.²⁹

Kanmubong Ridge was the name of the heights the Marines would attack. Consisting of Hills 812, 980, 1052, 673, 751, 680, and 749, this was a murderous piece of terrain by any estimate, consisting of, “highly organized defensive positions built around a multitude of earth and log bunkers and supported by heavy deployment of artillery of all calibers.” (See Map # 22) The 7th Marines had to take it, however, to allow X Corps to be able to attack the NKPA MLR (Main Line of Resistance) thought to be over two miles north beyond it—as it turned out the Kanmubong complex was part of the enemy MLR--and to maintain better defense of the Hays Line.³⁰

²⁸ First Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 9.

²⁹ Oral account of PFC Troy Hamm, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 296-97.

³⁰ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 14; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; First Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 13.

The method to the approach was that the 7th Marines would seize Objective Able on the eastern tip of the ridge and assault along the top of the ridge to Objective Baker. “. . . The narrow axis of advance would limit the assault to one regiment at a time.” From the amount of forces allocated to each objective, the Marines clearly underestimated the amount of resistance the enemy would put up as well as the amount of time that would be required to take the objectives, but then, “intel” at the time estimated this area to be only an OPLR (outpost line of resistance) for the enemy. Night “harassing fires” began at 2100 September 10 on the checkpoints to be assaulted the next day. These fires would increase as the attack progressed, lifting just ahead of the infantry and under control of FOs (forward observers).³¹

One Marine who was in Baker Company, 1/7, said of the enemy bunkers on Hills 673:

This hill had been pounded by our artillery and mortars so much that the trees were nothing but stumps. The few that were left standing were nothing but skeletons. The slopes had the consistency of powder. When you walked, you sank into the ground up to your ankles. You thought, “Lord, how could there have been that much opposition alive up there after that?” But after reaching the top, two days later, you could see how they managed. Bunkers, with four to six feet of dirt and rocks on top of logs, had connecting trenches. There were also trenches leading from the bunkers and the forward slope to the rear of the hill for evacuating the dead and wounded and also for bringing in men and supplies. This kept them from exposing themselves to our fire.³²

These were the types of positions that only napalm and rockets from a Marine plane, flying so close to the trees that they nearly scrape the bottom of the Chance-

³¹ Joseph H. Alexander, “Kanmubong Ridge: Final Marine Offensive of the Korean War,” *Leatherneck* 84 (September 2001), 18; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 14; Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, Operation Order 14-51.

³² Jack L. Cannon, “Attack on Hills 673 and 749,” 22-23.

Vaught F4U Corsair, were able to neutralize reliably. The only weapon that could and would ultimately destroy every one was the rifleman.

The battalions were atop Yoke Ridge before the attack from Hill 602 to Hill 924 and along the Hays Line east of 602 to the river. The Marines of 2/7 were on the Hays Line, the companies end to end in a line of defensive positions (two companies forward and one in reserve) from about Hill 924 eastward to 3/7's positions (starting at Hill 602). The Third Battalion, 7th Marines, too was on the Hays Line to the right of 2/7, sandwiched between Hill 602 and the river.³³

For September 11th, D-day, 2/7 had the job of patrolling on the regiment's left in constant contact ("buttoned up") with the KMCs, and of maintaining defenses on the Hays Line minus Easy Company, which would be the regimental reserve. The purpose of the patrolling was stated to be "to deny the enemy routes of approach to the 3/7 zone of action. . . ."³⁴

The assault battalions were 3/7 and 1/7. The Marines of 3/7 had the job of taking Regimental Checkpoint 1. This was Hill 680. (See Map # 20) The other Checkpoints were to be the task of 1/7. The CO of 3/7, Lt Col B. T. Kelly, had How Company move out at night (0230) before the assault and to attack at first light, but the weather did not cooperate. Despite the rain, the NKPA enemy discovered the Marines before they were close enough to assault by surprise. Probably some unfortunate had triggered one of the many enemy mines. A hot fight ensued stopping the assault company halfway up

³³ First Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Chronological Narrative from September 2nd through September 11th ; Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Overlays of Positions; Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6.

³⁴ Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Daily Narrative of Activities.

680 (which some of the men of How Company would call “Sanguine Hill”) from the southeast approach.³⁵

We fanned out to move up fingers of this mountain of 30 to 35 degrees. We moved carefully. When we were about halfway up, the shit hit the fan. James Dettman and I were together. We took everything, 81[2]mm mortars, burp guns, .50-caliber machine guns—every bit of it. Small arms, you name it! When someone tells me what hell’s like, I’ve been there. Sheets of dirt, rock, and tree fragments rained upon us. We had gooks all around. There was only one thing to do—fight forward or fight backward.

Dettman and I hit this depression together. I look out, right into the mouth of this machine gun. The gunner is trying to take me out. James and I pooled our resources and put ourselves back to back. We were in a crossfire. Anyway you moved they were going to get you. The water jacket on the .50-caliber trying to get me looked big as a saucer. If I could hit that thing, the barrel’s heat would make it sway out of commission in no time. For the moment the depression is shielding us. The .50-caliber’s fire is bouncing off and over us by inches. . . . While I take out this machine gun, Dettman keeps ‘em off our ass and talks to F-80 Saber jet pilots providing air support. . . .

I’m getting hotter then something hits me. “Oh my God! I’m hit!”

James looks at me. “You’re hit bad.”

I feel the depression in my head where my eye used to be. I could see nothing. My nose was gone. I can’t see!

. . . I didn’t lose consciousness and wasn’t scared. I prayed. . . .

[Soon, Moore made it to a corpsman.] It was Doc Willie Stewart, navy corpsman, and he packed the cavity in my cranium and gave me a vial of morphine.³⁶

Broken down by companies, 3/7’s assault that day proceeded as follows: How Company stepped out at 0230 to take Checkpoint 1. The night was dark and rainy, making for much mud and slow going. How stepped into a hornet’s nest of death and fire by 0738 at the southern tip of 680. At 0830, How began to take heavy mortar fire.

³⁵ Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, Operation Order 14-51; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 14; Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 288. “We had finally taken what we referred to as bloody ridge. The Marine historians called it something else and I later heard that army troops were on a different ridge that they called Bloody Ridge. Hell, we didn’t have much respect for either of them anyway so I figured we could call it what we wanted. The history of combat in Korea is almost non-existent or is lacking in accuracy. I heard one historian who questioned two or three men about what happened after a battle. He said their comments could be anything depending on where they were located and what they saw.” -- Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

³⁶ Oral account of Wadie Moore in Mackey Murdock, *The Forgotten War: Texas Veterans Remember Korea* (Plano, TX: Republic of Texas Press, 2002): 105.

Within ten minutes, it had several wounded, two of which were platoon leaders. One of the officers hit was Lt. Tom Carline, the leader of the 3rd Platoon.³⁷

Charles Hughes was a corpsman with How Company 3/7. He later recounted the experiences of the Marines of 3/7 in the assault on Hill 680:

At 0230 they moved out in the dark on this rainy, foggy night and made their way single file down the rocky trail leading to the creek below. Visibility was so bad each man had to hold his hand to the back of the man in front in order to keep the company together, and the steep rocky trail caused many men to stumble and fall in the difficult descent to the valley below. [In addition, searchlights cast the hills ahead into stark relief and eerie, shifting shadows.] By the time How Company had reached the creek and was ready to begin the assault on 680, daylight had come. . . .³⁸

One artillery FO with How Company was Sergeant Jim Dettman. He later wrote a letter to his radio man about the events of that day:

I with Lt. Young marked concentrations on the objective, possible mortar positions and possible troop concentrations. When we jumped off, to call in artillery all I had to do was shoot a new azimuth. . . .

. . . We were about half way up the ridge when we saw 4 or 5 gooks sitting around a fire. One of them got up and started to urinate when he saw us. He yelled and all hell broke loose.³⁹

The account of Charles Hughes continued:

When the curtain of fog lifted they were fully exposed to the enemy above who had them in the sights of their heavy maxim machine guns, burp guns and rifles, and they cut loose at the Marines of How Company with blistering effectiveness. . . . Within less than an hour there were many How Company casualties, including two platoon leaders.

One of those two was the leader of the 3rd Platoon, Lt. Tom Carline, who lay exposed to the enemy fire with an almost certain likelihood of being killed. When Hoagy Carmichael ["Hoagy" was his nickname, after the singer] spotted him he dashed through the mortar rounds and gunfire, picked up the lieutenant and carried him to safety. . . . he later received the bronze star.⁴⁰

³⁷ Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7; Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 289-90.

³⁸ Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 288.

³⁹ Letter from Jim Dettman to Wadie Moore, printed in: Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 292.

⁴⁰ Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 288.

The battalion sent Item Company to attack from the southwest to lift enough enemy pressure that How Company could move forward. How Company then infiltrated towards the crest while receiving heavy machine gun and mortar fire. They were fifty yards from it when enemy fire pinned it in place again. Item Company in the confusion had moved to How Company's part of the hill, so the attack, instead of a converging movement from two directions, became one from a single direction.⁴¹

One Marine machine gunner, Jon Charles Genrich, remembered How 3/7's attack that day:

In the dim morning light we started up the ridge on the trail. The climb was very steep the first several hundred yards. We were spaced out about ten feet apart, which didn't seem like very much space as we followed the path. After climbing about half an hour, we stopped and everyone took a little break. We figured they must have had a patrol scouting ahead of the company. I was somewhat surprised as this didn't seem like the way we had been taught to advance on a hill. . . . We proceeded up the trail, unable to see much for about half a mile because of the tall trees and wooded area. Then everything happened at once. The enemy pinned us down with automatic gun fire, trimming limbs from trees and pounding us with mortars, mostly hitting the main body of the company. It reminded me of an amphibious landing on a beach as they let the first few waves "land" and then tried to blow the remainder out of the water. The few closing in on the enemy were in a heavy ground fight.

We had heavy automatic fire coming from our left flank and mortars exploding all around. We hit the deck and the little branches rained down on us from the heavy firepower chopping up the trees. They yelled, "Machine guns up" and the squad leader, gunner, and assistant gunner moved out up the path. . . . I grabbed an extra can of ammo, dropped my pack, and started running up the path with my rifle and three boxes of ammo. Gunny Sergeant Studebaker yelled, "Get down. You're going to get hit." I yelled back., "They don't have ammo for the machine guns," and kept running. Brave? No. I was just doing my job. The limbs and twigs kept falling all around, but I felt the squad was depending on me.

I didn't know how far ahead they had gone but I finally caught up with them. They had the gun set up on the left flank, firing at a smaller ridge about 200 yards away. I dropped the ammo and told them I didn't think the rest of the ammo was coming. Murph said for me to get back behind them and start digging a hole as they needed cover. They hadn't been able to dig in yet as the

⁴¹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14; Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7-8; Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5-6.

exchange of fire was heavy with J. B. and Richard on the gun. I started digging but it was mostly solid rock with just a little dirt. In what seemed like hours, but was more likely about ten minutes, I had a hole two feet deep.⁴²

It was now past noon. The engaged companies waited in place while supporting arms (artillery and mortars) worked over the objective. Finally, airstrikes added napalm and strafing to the mix. The Marines then made two assaults, but each time the enemy sensed the supporting fires had lifted and came up out of their emplacements. The Marines ended up being pushed back down the hill to near their starting points. Darkness found the assault companies dug in (with some shifting of positions) 300 yards short of the objective to await the next day.⁴³

More technically, the above actions proceeded thusly: At 0908, Item Company, while How was under heavy mortar fire and had just lost two platoon leaders, was ordered to move up near George Company on Hill 602, prepared to go to How Company's aid by assaulting the 680 from the opposite slope from How Company. Baker 1/5 had taken How's position on the Hays Line at 0530, then was given responsibility for the entire section of the 7th Marines's sector of Hays, the section from 602 east to the river. How Company reported at 0915 that it was still in a hot fight and could not get closer than fifty yards to the crest of Hill 680. Even the CP of the 81mm platoon received heavy enemy 82mm mortar fire and lost some men. Item Company then got word to jump off in the attack as soon as an airstrike arrived to soften its part of the objective. Item, too, took enemy 82mm mortar fire. However, the airstrike did not hit until 1355. Immediately thereafter, Item jumped off to help How Company and both

⁴² Oral Memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

⁴³ Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5. ; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14; Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7-8.

companies were in a thick engagement against NKPA emplacements staring down at them across a steep, hard-to-climb slope that would give even a climber unharassed by bullets and shells pause.⁴⁴

Charles Hughes's account continued:

Roy Westerman, a young Marine from Arkansas following Lt. Carline up Sanguine was hit in the waist and stumbled to the ground. When he checked to see where he was hit he found the bullet had struck an ammo clip on his belt and in his hurried search he could find no wound; so he picked up his M-1 and continued to move up the hill. Almost immediately he was hit in the head and everything went black. . . . The Marines who saw him on the ground lying still with such a terrible head wound believed him to be dead. A corpsman did get to him and put a battle dressing over the wound and pulled his cap down over his head to staunch the flow of blood, but even he could not have given Roy much hope for survival. [However, Roy did survive. Later he found out the first hit had wounded him after all.]⁴⁵

Shortly after 1400, both companies fell back to the LD to let supporting arms give the hill another good working-over with artillery, heavy mortars (the 4.2 inch "chemical" mortar), and when available, airstrikes. Two more strikes from planes did arrive and blistered the slope with storms of napalm, strafing with .50 caliber machine guns (the F4-U Corsair, the most commonly utilized plane for CAS by the 1st Mar Div, carried six .50 caliber machine guns), and shattering blasts from rockets. At 1504, the two companies again sprung over the LD into the attack. This time, "a few men reached the top, but the casualties were so heavy that both companies were denied a hold on the objective." They pulled back to reorganize 100 yards from the top. George Company minus one platoon left on 602, pushed forward to support its brother units at 1651,

⁴⁴ Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7.

⁴⁵ Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 289-90.

attacking up the southwest slope of 680. Its other platoon would join the fray as soon as 2/7 could send a force to relieve it.⁴⁶

It was during the actions of 3/7, September 11, that PFC Joseph L. Giovannucci distinguished himself. Giovannucci was an Assistant Machine Gunner in How 3/7. He was wounded in the right hand in his company's assault on Hill 680, but he refused evacuation and "continued to aid in delivering devastating fire against the enemy in the face of intense hostile mortar, automatic-weapons and small arms fire." Giovannucci stayed for over four hours, ever refusing evacuation, and was wounded again by enemy grenade fragments in both legs and feet. "Despite severe pain and loss of blood, he continued to assist in firing his gun until ordered to be evacuated and, by his aggressive fighting spirit and fortitude, served to inspire all who observed him. His outstanding courage, daring initiative and steadfast devotion to duty were contributing factors in the success of his company. . . ." Giovannucci was the first of eleven Marines who would receive the Navy Cross during this battle, the nation's second highest award for bravery in combat.⁴⁷

Item company took one small counterattack at 1720, which crumbled and fled under the blistering fire of the Marine weapons. Twenty minutes later, How and Item set up defensive positions in perimeter on the southeast corner of 680. George reached the river and began crossing at 1835, but it was too close to dark to start an attack.

Therefore, this company dug in on the low ground just north of the river between Yoke

⁴⁶ Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7-8.

⁴⁷ Navy Cross Award Citation of Joseph L. Giovannucci. All the citations of Marines who earned the Navy cross can be found, among other places, in: C. Douglas Sterner, ed., *Marine Corps Valor: U. S. Marine Corps Recipients of the Navy Cross, Korean War*, (Pueblo, CO: HomeOfHeroes.com, 2006); Joseph A. Saluzzi, *Red Blood . . . Purple Hearts: The Marines in the Korean War* (New York: Eagle Productions, 1993).

and Kanmubong Ridges to be in position to attack at first light. All evening saw enemy 76mm artillery and 82mm mortar shells bombard the companies of 3/7.⁴⁸

BAR man Joe Sipolski was there that day as well:

I often think of that day 11th September. I remember that night march to Sanguine. That empty, tight knot in my stomach was a little tighter that morning. It didn't take long to get in the fight. It looked like half the 1st Platoon was wiped out in minutes, as the wounded were working their way through our position. It was not a morale builder. I was working my way to the right of the main finger and was surprised to see how close we were to the bunkers above. I tried to get a few shots off but my BAR was jammed. As we worked our way up the hill, all hell was breaking loose. I hit the ground, but obviously not in a good spot. Shrapnel hit me in the shoulder and a bullet hit my left forearm and traveled nine inches up through my arm. I worked my way back to the wounded area, was shot up with morphine, and later started the trip back down the hill with another Marine who had a bullet wound through his thigh. He had just been with How Co. for 5 days. . . . [After the battle, a division order went out that no new replacements could be put into combat until they had been with their unit at certain number of days.]

It was just starting to get dark when I reached the first hospital tent. . . . I walked into this tiny room in the tent, just enough room for three operating tables. On the first table was a Marine who appeared to have a bullet hole clean through his chest. He was sitting up. On the table to the right was a Marine with his foot hanging only by the skin. On the center table was a Marine lying half propped up with 2 doctors working on him. His face had been blown open and I could see inside his head. The docs were talking to him as they worked, and he was trying to answer back with gurgling sounds. . . .

I walked out of the room and told a corpsman, "I don't belong in there with those Marines; they're fighting for their lives. . . ." I was loaded on a truck and sent back to the larger hospital in the rear⁴⁹

Later that day, Genrich was ordered to go see what had become of the other ammo bearers and he dashed off to where he had left his pack to see.

They were no longer at that location. I was told some men were carrying wounded down the hill. I gathered up about four cans of ammo and my pack, and it was all I could do to lug them back up the hill. The distance seemed much further with the load. . . . I noticed we were only about 40 feet from the edge of

⁴⁸ Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7-8.

⁴⁹ Letter of Joe Sipolski to Wadie Moore, October 1999, printed in: Charles Hughes, *Accordion War*, 293-94.

the trees going up the hill. In front of the trees was barren, clay-like ground for about 75 yards to the top where the tree line started again.

Several attempts had been made by rifle squads to rush up the hill, I was told, but they had been shot up pretty badly. . . . While I was coming back up [the hill] I saw J. B. coming down the hill with part of his hand shot off. He had also been hit in the shoulder. . . . he had to lie all night at the bottom of the hill before he could get medical aid the next morning. He was lucky that he didn't bleed to death.

. . . When I got to the gun, Richard was firing. I jumped down in the hole to help load the gun and assist him. The mortar rounds seem to mostly be hitting back down the hill, but we had a half dozen hit close and throw rocks. . . . I heard later that a sergeant and a private in a foxhole back down the hill had a direct hit by mortar fire. We heard they picked them up in a body bag, not knowing how to separate body parts.

. . . I may have wasted several hundred rounds the next hour, as I started firing for where I thought [the enemy] could be concealed. There were several groups of heavy brush about 30 feet long and six feet high still covered with heavy foliage. I searched and traversed back and forth at different heights firing bursts, and then fired up in the trees the same way for possible snipers. It seemed to quiet down for a while after that. Maybe the enemy was waiting for me to use up the ammo.⁵⁰

Genrich then related that his unit dug in for the night.

There was a little rise to the left of us and I couldn't see any of our men, but could hear them firing. To the right about 20 yards away were two riflemen in a small hole. They were about ten feet from the edge of the treeline before the open ground area going to the top of the hill. This was all we could see from our position, but we could feel and hear other Marines around.

The darkness started to settle in and I ate my last can of C-rations, which I would have saved had I known it was the last food for four days. . . . Richard . . . told me of the heavy casualties. The only officer left was the new 2nd Lieutenant from Brooklyn who had joined Howe Company about five days after I had arrived.

I went from ammo carrier to gunner in about five hours. The assistant gunner became the squad leader as we were the only two left in the squad. Richard was a little depressed for the first time. He said they outnumbered us 50-to-1 and could overrun us anytime they wanted. I was young and new and said, "Never! We're Marines. Nobody can beat us!" This was some of the brainwashing leftover from stateside training. I told Richard that I had to take a crap and I was going to go down the hill in front of the gun. He told me to do it on top of the hill near the foxhole. I said that I didn't want to smell up our area and went about 20 feet down in front of our hole. We later heard after the hill was secured that they had over 2,500 land mines on the hill and not one Marine stepped on one. I guess they didn't expect us to use the path on the way up the hill.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Night positions for 3/7 were as follows. George was in a long irrigation ditch just north of the river. How and Item were in defensive positions near the top of 680. The night was no picnic for 3/7. "The first night about 2200 hours they started heavy mortar fire and it shook the ground all around us. We knew we couldn't sleep at night anyway, and learned the ones that we heard before they hit would miss us."⁵²

The attack of 1/7 on September 11 was towards Hill 673. Baker Company was on point and stepped out at 0300. Able Company followed in close support. Charlie was the reserve, but close at hand. Charlie and Baker began taking SA fire at 0730 from Check Point 2. By 0825, Baker was pinned down. Able was in column behind Baker and began deploying eastward. Able and Baker surged into an attack at 1100 under heavy SA, AW, artillery and mortar fire. Dust, mud, blood, and exploding steel filled the air. Each explosion was a flash and then a KRAAAKOOOOM like the sound of a gunshot only deeper and elongated to ten times the length in duration. It was also many times louder. The smells of cordite, sweat, dirt, and death were heavy. The Marines pushed on with parched throats and smoke-stung eyes. Some felt the fragments or bullets that hit them like the kick of a mule or the smash of a hammer. Others, even badly wounded, didn't feel the metal that pierced them at all, only realizing they were hit when their strength began to bleed out with their life. Concussions lifted men from their feet or pushed them hard against the earth, tore off helmets, or knocked over kneeling corpsmen tending wounds. The sound of gunfire was a constant ripple, an unrelenting staccato like the drumming hits of a hard hail on a tin roof. The fire became so a man could no longer stand it lest the fabric of his mind shred apart like rents in wet paper and

⁵² Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8; Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

Baker pulled back from the objective at 1210. Supporting arms would have to further pound the enemy bunkers. Able and Baker Companies leapt forward again together at 1545 again to dash through steel, hit the dirt, lay down some covering fire for the next fireteam to do the same, then get up and do it again when that fireteam's bellies found the earth. But they were pushed back at 1700. Baker disengaged under artillery covering fire ten minutes later.⁵³

By 1745 Charlie joined the attack and then made a night assault through mines and booby traps. Soon it too had to fall back to defensive positions. Total losses for 1/7 this day were 68 WIA and 4 KIA.⁵⁴

In the AT section attached to Baker 1/7 was PFC Troy Hamm. He remembered the approach to Hill 673:

We began our assault on Hill 673 early the next morning [11 September]. Our guns were to knock out a large enemy machine-gun bunker. This particular gun was in such a strategic location on the hill that if it wasn't knocked out we would lose a lot of men.

My squad was ordered to move up as close to the bunker as we could, then set up and fire on it. Without warning, the machine-gun opened up. I flattened out like a lizard. I was only 150 yards away from its muzzle.

A Marine above me on the hill was hit by the first burst. He was already on the ground when the rounds ripped down his back and whistled over me. Our squad leader yelled, "Ammo up!" The gun had been set up and was ready to fire. Before we could move, another squad farther back fired at the bunker; its first round went right into the bunker. A flamethrower was sent forward and finished off the position. When I walked past it, I saw it had been constructed of logs, plus about ten feet of dirt, which is why the artillery and air strikes had been unable to neutralize it.

When we took the hill, we found some Marines who had been captured. They had their hands tied behind them, and had been brutally murdered. [These may have been KMCs.]⁵⁵

⁵³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14; Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5-6.

⁵⁴ First Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Chronological Narrative for September 11, 1951.

⁵⁵ Oral account of PFC Troy Hamm, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 296-97.

Jack L. Cannon was attached as a sniper to Baker Company 1/7:

The company saddled up at 0400 after our artillery support (2/11), along with our mortars, had begun pounding 673 and 749. The firing continued as we moved down across the Soyang River. . . . After we waded the river, we began to climb up a sharp ridge or finger leading up to the base of 673. Our 105s, "Four-Deuces" (4.2-inch mortars), and 81mm. mortars worked on 673 and 749 for about three hours until we were in position in front at the base of 673. . . . A short time later, at about 0800 all hell broke loose. . . . The North Koreans put up a suicidal and fanatical defense. They were well dug in, with excellent fields of fire, and were well-supplied. They held high ground and had good cover and concealment. They had planted antipersonnel mines every damn where they thought you might step. There would be bayonet and hand-to-hand fighting here, too. . . .

Some parts of the hill were so steep that the North Koreans didn't have to throw grenades. They would just pull the pin or yank the string in the handle to ignite the fuse and then roll the grenades down the slope.⁵⁶

The assault of 1/7 also became bogged down under the heavy enemy fire. These Marines had to dig in at nightfall (2330 after Charlie's night assault was repulsed by heavy fire).⁵⁷

The day had cost the whole division 11 KIA and 59 WIA, and 9 WIA among the KMCs. Enemy losses were: 25 counted KIA, 35 estimated WIA, and 6 POWS. These numbers are surprisingly low considering the amount of fire thrown against the attacking units.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Jack L. Cannon, "Attack on Hills 673 and 749," 22.

⁵⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 183; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14; Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6.

⁵⁸ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14.

CHAPTER 7

THE 1ST MARINES ARRIVE

Day Two: September 12

Colonel Herman Nickerson, CO 7th Marines, came up with a plan. He sent his reserve, 2/7, to make a night movement past 1/7's left flank into the enemy's rear (the enemy on Hill 673, a whole regiment). Thus 1/7 would be to its front and 2/7 would be to its rear to cut off retreat. When September 12 dawned, two 2/7 platoons were in place for the assault. "The Marines in the Korean War were no longer content to yield the night to the enemy as had been the norm in the Pacific war. Inspired by the now-legendary cross-country night march of LtCol Ray Davis and his 1/7 in the relief of Toktong Pass the previous December, the 1st Mar Div had made low visibility operations a priority subject in its training programs."¹

Ralph B. Steele of Fox 2/7 remembered one moment of the advance:

So next morning we take off and we're moving into that valley and we get – we're coming off the line or off this particular line east – we're marching east. My buddy said if . . . we get down to that stream and we turn right we're going into reserve. Still hadn't dawned on us attack was imminent. If we turned left or north we're going in the attack. Well, we saw the column down there making a left turn . . . heading for the attack.²

The enemy had no clue what hit them. The Marines of 2/7 crushed many NKPA troops atop 673, and victory would have been complete for that objective, save heavy land mine concentrations between the two Marine battalions kept them from fully closing

¹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 184; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15; Joseph H. Alexander, "Kanmubong Ridge," 19.

² Ralph B. Steele Interview Transcript, Library of Congress.

the trap. The battle on Hill 673 turned into an exchange of grenades as 1/7 inched up the hill against heavy resistance, making the crest after 1400 that afternoon.³

Charlie Company stepped out at 0635 toward Hill 673 and had already found enemy resistance by 0640. Able and Baker were prepared to assist Charlie, but received an estimated 360 rounds of mortar and artillery incoming. The plan was for a “frontal assault and double envelopment using all three companies,” (a dangerous maneuver because there is a strong potential in it for fratricide). By 0930, Charlie had only advanced about 200 yards. In coordination with Able and Baker Companies, the elements of 1/7 finally reached the top of 673 by 1415.

The battle was ugly and deadly. Also with Baker Company, 1/7, was Jack L.

Cannon:

As I was going up the front of 673 on September 12, I passed a Marine with a mortar round embedded in his chest with just the fins sticking out. I think he might have still been alive. It hadn't exploded. A little further on, I passed a red-headed Marine whose face I knew (I didn't know his name), lying on his back, with his head downhill. He had a .51-caliber hole in his forehead and the back of his head was gone. . . . At about 1030, a flame thrower operator was going up the same way I was now going. His target was a bunker that was directly in our path. This Marine stopped within 25 feet of the bunker, then torched it, frying the occupants inside. I didn't think he would make it—but he did. I watched him all the way.⁴

The Marines also received supporting fire from tanks. Cannon described their actions:

Tanks from either “Charlie” or “Dog” company were firing from approximately 1,200 yards to our right rear into bunkers where heavy machine guns were located. Those tankers were damned good. They were putting high explosive rounds [90mm] into a 20-inch aperture to knock out those Maxims (machine guns).

As the men in the assault platoon were nearing the top of 673, the 90mm. tank rifle rounds were clearing their heads by about 40 feet. The skipper was

³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 184; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 15.

⁴ Jack L. Cannon, “Attack on Hills 673 and 749,” 24.

yelling into his radio for them to lift their fire. One bunker, on a little knob that jutted out from the right side of 673, had one of the machine guns that were giving us problems. One tank round went into the aperture. Maxim and crew went straight up through the logs, dirt and rocks, about 50 feet in the air.⁵

Sergeant Frederick W. Mausert was a Squad Leader in Baker, 1/7. His company was pinned down and getting decimated in a hail of murderous enemy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire. Mausert leapt from cover and ran through the dense minefields, enemy rounds striking all around him, to move two badly injured Marines to cover. He received an excruciating head wound in the process, but refused evacuation. He insisted on staying with his squad. His platoon was ordered to assault a few minutes later, and Mausert led his men "in a furious bayonet charge against the first of a literally impregnable series of bunkers." He fell to the ground stunned when a bullet hit his helmet, but was back up a moment later, still driving forward. He personally knocked out one machine gun nest and helped destroy several other emplacements. He reorganized his men for a "renewed fight to the final objective on top of the ridge." He then, "boldly left his position when the enemy's fire gained momentum," making himself visible to the enemy to draw their fire off his men so they could get into position for the assault. He charged alone into the teeth of the machine gun fire. He was severely wounded again, but still refused aid. He again led an assault to "the topmost machine-gun nest and bunkers, the last bulwark," of the enemy. He once more leapt into "the wall of fire," and wiped out one more MG before being mortally wounded. His "fortitude, great personal valor and extraordinary heroism in the face of almost certain death, had inspired his

⁵ Jack L. Cannon, "Attack on Hills 673 and 749," 24.

men to sweep on, overrun and finally secure the objective.” He would receive a posthumous Medal of Honor.⁶

The double envelopment had proven successful—the companies had made much progress. At 1800, 1/7 had dug in atop 673 for the night. These Marines counted at least 30 enemy KIA on the slopes of the wooded hill. In addition, 1/7 estimated another 185 enemy to be KIA plus a large number wounded. The unit also captured three POWs who were from the 2nd Regiment, 1st NKPA Division, III Corps. The First Battalion, 7th Marines alone had sustained 35 WIA and 16 KIA this day.⁷

Cpl Charles Rust was part of Baker Company 1/7. Rust was a Fire Team Leader, and as such, led his fire team against bunkers on 673, knocking out the first of four with grenades. He was hit in the arm but refused evacuation and continued to assault enemy bunkers. He took up a BAR and used a tree stump to support its weight because of his injured arm. His fire was deemed accurate and effective in covering the advance. He neutralized an NKPA machine gun nest and then joined the final assault on the hill. His squad leader fell to fatal wounds, and Rust took over as squad leader. He charged through machine gun fire and a heavy concentration of enemy grenades in an attack that lifted enough enemy pressure that his unit secured its objective. Mortally wounded in the attempt, Rust fell at last. Charles Vernon Rust was awarded a posthumous Navy Cross.⁸

PFC Troy Hamm described the first night on Hill 673:

⁶ Medal of Honor Award Citation for Frederick W. Mausert, III. All the Medal of Honor citations listed in this study can be found at: <http://www.homeofheroes.com> (website last consulted April 2007), and in Joseph Saluzzi, *Red Blood . . . Purple Hearts*.

⁷ First Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, Chronological narrative for 12th September.

⁸ Navy Cross Award Citation for Charles Vernon Rust.

We moved up the hill and learned quickly to walk on the trails that the North Koreans had used; the rest of the hillside was covered with land mines and booby traps.

That night we sat our gun on top of the skyline in a bomb crater. Five of us move back to another large hole. There were no trees, bushes—not even twigs. The whole mountaintop was bare, the soil, from the pounding it had received, was like silt.

We began catching incoming rounds. We heard the POP in the mortar tube, then along the ridgeline to the right, POW! We began to count the explosions and soon realized they were coming closer; the North Koreans were walking the rounds toward us. We hunched as low as we could get. The next round hit to our left. The one after that exploded to our right. They had bracketed our hole. The next round would land on top of us. We prayed out loud. A round hit next to us. One guy screamed and began to run. The section leader reached up and tripped him. We held the man down. I held my breath and waited. CRASH! A flash of light. I could smell and taste the powder. We lay in a heap for I don't know how long. A lieutenant had been hit. He had shrapnel in his back, head and legs. We lay in that hole all night. It was very difficult to evacuate the wounded.

We got word later that we would be relieved by the 1st Marines. We had lost too many men to effectively resume the attack in the morning. [The relief would not begin to occur until the next night. There would be another 7th Marines attack the next morning.]⁹

Later that day, 1/7 began to help with the assault on Hill 749, but because of low ammo, had some delays. Jack L. Cannon was still with the action:

As we . . . secured 673 and continued the attack out on Ridgeline 749, we were low on ammunition and extremely low on grenades. Some of the men were going back to the bunkers on the face of 673 and gathering up North Korean grenades and “potato mashers” . . . Some of them still had wet paint. I had gone back to the bunker which was to the left of the one that the flame thrower operator had cooked. I set my rifle down outside the bunker and went in to get grenades. This one had a “T” entrance. That is, as you entered, you went back a few feet and could then go either right or left into it.

As my eyes were adjusting to the dimness, I saw an enemy soldier with a “burp gun” cradled in his lap, sitting against the wall. I was sure I saw him blink. There was no time to think about it; I had to close the gap between us as fast as possible and at the same time unsheathe the commando knife (Fairburn-Sykes) that I always carried on my belt. I drove the knife into the chest area and was surprised how easily it slid to the hilt. He had been hit in the body earlier, so he couldn't move too fast. . . .¹⁰

⁹ Oral account of PFC Troy Hamm, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 297- 98.

¹⁰ Jack L. Cannon, “Attack on Hills 673 and 749,” 25.

The soldier's little red ID book showed he was an NCO and had been in the North Korean Army fifteen years. He had been wounded six times in his career.¹¹

Mines caused many casualties, they were everywhere in the area, but not all were the buried, contact-type in activation. Many were triggered by trip wire. Jack L. Cannon continued:

While walking away from that bunker, I felt a tug on my boondocker shoe and I froze in mid-stride. There, caught in the sole, was an almost invisible green trip wire, which led to the largest (it seemed at the time) antipersonnel mine I had ever seen. When I stopped, I had already pulled the pin halfway out. I got the wire off my boondocker and the tension off that trip wire. Then I marked it so someone else wouldn't screw up and hit it. It took me quite a while to settle down after that little episode. I thought, "Damn, we take this hill and *then* I get killed."¹²

And even after a hill was completely secured, the enemy would still send in incoming. Taking cover could prove to be a most unpleasant experience. "The stench from North Korean corpses was everywhere. We had to use some of the bunkers still filled with corpses in order to avoid getting killed by their mortars and artillery, as they began to shell the hill they had just gotten knocked off."¹³

September 12th also brought success to 3/7 against Hill 680. How and Item Companies attacked up the same southeast part of the hill, while George Company converged up the other side from the southwest. The latter company had to demolish at least seven bunkers still occupied by enemy troops.¹⁴

Thinned ranks were evident throughout 3/7. Genrich remembered:

The word was out that we were surrounded and they would be dropping ammo from planes, but no food or water. One of the guys found a water spring down the hillside and they went down in the dark to fill canteens. We were told that only about 35 men were left on the hill. Why be concerned? I still felt we

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 184; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15.

would come out on top. The second day we had a little sporadic fire, but with the planes overhead it was much calmer. They dropped ammo to us, but two-thirds went into enemy occupied areas. . . .

The Lieutenant was going to take one rifleman down the hill to try to make it to headquarters. The company commander in his absence would be a corporal from one of the rifle platoons. We still had a sergeant left in third section machine guns, but they were only attached to the company so not in the direct line of command. I must admit in my mind that I felt the Lieutenant was bugging out while he still could and I didn't expect him to come back.¹⁵

Genrich related another experience:

I was sitting behind the gun [that] morning and the sun had been up about one hour when I saw North Koreans jumping up and running. It had been so quiet that I was very surprised and started shooting as two, then three more, jumped up and ran toward the higher part of the hill. . . . I hit four or five but it should have been a dozen. Since I had been caught by surprise, my accuracy was not as good as it should have been. Then I saw several more figures under a couple of huge shade trees at the far end of the ridge where it had a steep drop off. I turned and fired several bursts at the figures in the shadows and then I saw a couple move into the sunlight. They were Marines and I stopped firing almost in shock. I later found out that they were from George Company. We were on the front perimeter and some of our troops hadn't been told that Marines were coming up the other ridge on the attack. Richard got back and I told him what had happened. He said, "You had no way of knowing." I prayed to myself that I hadn't killed any Marines.¹⁶

Broken down by companies, that day's action for 3/7 against Hill 680 proceeded as follows. The platoon George Company had left on 602 received orders at 0230 to join the rest of the company to be prepared for the coming day's assault. George stepped out in the assault at dawn and was almost at 680 by 0600, but did not make contact with the enemy until 0830 that morning. George's commander maneuvered his men in a double envelopment, which succeeded in moving his men up the final 500 yards of the hill in "fast moving attack that never lost its momentum. Expertly moving fire teams and squads quickly reduced seven active bunkers by the use of organic weapons and hand grenades." The left platoon's point fire team rushed a key machine gun

¹⁵ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

bunker on the “first pinnacle of the objective” at 0950, chucking grenades through the apertures and spraying the interior with bullets after the CRUMP, CRUMP, CRUMP and spray of dust that announced the grenades’ lethal detonations. This platoon then organized to repulse enemy counterattacks and await reinforcement. Soon after, the “right flank platoon passed through the position.” “Since the North Koreans had taken off, we grabbed the gun and raced up the barren open area to try and beat George Company to the top of the hill. This is something that I had heard when I first arrived—that machineguns in final assault of a hill tried to be the first to the top. They had been on several hills before and we were trying to be the first on this hill. Several riflemen beat us to the top before George Company made it up the hill. We were happy it was part of our Howe Company.”¹⁷

George Company had made it to the crest of Check Point 1, and How and Item moved up to form a perimeter. Soon after, at 1115, these Marines had to fight off an enemy counterattack against George’s left. They then reported their objective, Checkpoint 1, Hill 680, secured as of 1115. However, the enemy harassed the Marines with heavy incoming the rest of the day until dusk causing many casualties. The 3/7 OP alone received over seventy rounds of incoming just during the afternoon.¹⁸

On paper, that does not sound like many, but to a man hunkering for cover when he hears the shriek of a shell and suffering through the consummate CRASH and

¹⁷ Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8; Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich. Captain Robert C. Hendrickson, CO of George Company 3/7 led his Marines in the assault on 680, though suffering from wounds. His company attacked and overcame a battalion of defenders on the steep slopes and summit. He maneuvered his platoons skillfully despite a deluge of incoming from mortar and artillery, and “launched a vigorous and well-coordinated attack which neutralized successive entrenchments.” His company, as part of the battalion’s assault, secured Hill 680. He would be awarded the Navy Cross.

¹⁸ Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6; Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8.

shaking of the ground, praying all the while he survives, seventy shells can seem like a million and destroy a man's nerves. More than one combat veteran has broken under less pressure. In a barrage where no one was injured for instance, "an 82mm mortar shell landed in a foxhole beside the Marine occupant and failed to explode; the nervous strain was so great that this Marine was evacuated to the rear aid station."¹⁹

Genrich recalled setting up defenses that night:

Once we were on top [with] George Company, what was left of How Company set up defenses. We had a large hole on the reverse slope that gave a good field of fire for the machine gun. . . .

Someone came up with a couple of trip flares and I talked a Marine into going with me down the hill. I needed his rifle for protection. We went about 75 feet. We were on the side the enemy had retreated from and most likely the way they would come back in a counter attack. It was just starting to get a little dark and I set the trip wires for the flares in two open areas between trees.²⁰

That night at 2250, How Company repulsed a fifteen minute enemy counterattack.

Jon Charles Genrich described this, too:

We crawled into our foxholes and took turns catching an hour of sleep each until about 2300 hours, when somebody thought they had heard a noise. We were all alert when we heard a bugle start to blow a charge. I laughed with disbelief because they had told us about the blowing of bugles before a charge during advance training. The next minute one of my flares went off and everyone started firing down the hill. Then the second flare went off. I felt better about my contribution to the battle. I was satisfied that my flares had both worked and had given us a little light the first minute or longer. After I fired off my eighth round clip, I reloaded and decided to wait just in case some Koreans broke through on our flank. I thought I might need a full clip to protect the machine gun. The new Lieutenant was running up and down the ridge, throwing bandoleers of ammo to the men while the firefight was going on. I felt that maybe I had judged the Lieutenant too hard over the last two days.

We sat back and waited for the next charge while the artillery lay in a barrage. The first two or three rounds were short rounds that hit the tree tops with an air burst. Several men were hit with shrapnel and I heard more were hurt in George Company. This was not too surprising as the maps being used in many areas had been made by the Japanese during their occupation of Korea. Several errors were often found in maps when trying to drop artillery shells just over the

¹⁹ Second Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 78.

²⁰ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

ridge. A few feet of height or tall trees could cause rounds to explode in tree tops above our troops. The second charge never came, so maybe the artillery had zeroed in on their troops who were further down the hill organizing for the second charge, which was normal.

The rest of the night was quiet. We received some food. The first C-rations were all fruit cocktail and I had two cans and felt stuffed. I have always liked fruit cocktail ever since that day. . . .²¹

The remainder of the night was quiet for the Marines on 680, except for incoming shells. However, even sporadic shellfire in the dark of night is enough to make the night sleepless and hectic. "We heard that we were no longer surrounded and hoped to have more ammo and food delivered the next day. We were told Item Company had moved up the hill to move through our positions. I never saw Item Company so they must not have made it up to where we were located. The Lieutenant who had gone down the hill the night before returned sometime during the night, but I was not aware of it until later the next day."²²

One Marine of Item Company distinguished himself that day. 2nd Lt. George H. Ramer, Platoon Leader of 3rd Platoon, "fearlessly led his men up the steep slopes and, although he and the majority of his unit were wounded during the ascent, boldly continued to spearhead the assault." The slope became even steeper near the summit and going was slow. The enemy, now within grenade range, began to lob a hail of these missiles into the already thick fray. Nevertheless, Ramer charged on and destroyed one bunker with grenade and carbine fire. He and his remaining eight men captured the objective, Hill 680. "Unable to hold the position against an immediate, overwhelming hostile counterattack, he ordered his group to withdraw and single-handedly fought the enemy to furnish cover for his men and for the evacuation of three fatally wounded

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8-9; Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

Marines.” Ramer was badly wounded himself for the second time, but refused aid. When his men returned, he made them take cover, while he continued to defend against the enemy. He was eventually overwhelmed and mortally wounded. He would posthumously receive the award of the Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest award for bravery in combat.²³

After the attack in the morning had failed to completely wipe 673 clear of defenders, 2/7 had been turned north to attack Hill 749 while 1/7 had completed taking 673. It was a tough fight, but by 1700, Objective Baker was thought to be secured. That estimate was wrong. Only one knob of 749 had been attained. Hill 749 had dense woods cloaking its slopes and these masked other defenders. Other NKPA still manned bunkers between 2/7 and 1/7 in bypassed positions. Hard fighting would be required to secure these areas. Furthermore, much of the large hill was yet to be traversed by USMC feet.²⁴

Broken down by companies, the Marines of 2/7 assaulted thusly, after turning towards Hill 749 while it was still relatively early in the morning (0900): the battalion moved out that morning in column up a draw. One airstrike was reported to hit Hill 749 with “good results,” meaning it appeared to the FAC (Forward Air Controller) to have hit the target with good coverage.

Jon Charles Genrich related the experience of ground Marines when an airstrike was overhead:

Daybreak brought constant aircover from the Army, Navy, and Marines from daylight to sundown. We had Mustangs, Corsairs, and I believe some hellcats. As one group left, the next group arrived. They dropped bombs and

²³ Medal of Honor Award Citation for George H. Ramer.

²⁴ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 184; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 15.

napalm and fired 20mm's and machine guns at the enemy positions. Some of our guys thought they were being hit when the empty 20mm casings fell on them.

We had yellow and red banners lying out on the barren area so they would know where we were located. They flew so low they almost touched the tops of the trees and we could see their heads like the size of a softball in the cockpit. The jet fighters were not useful at low levels because hills, 3,000 feet high were only six to eight hundred yards apart. . . . When the jets were used, they would drop their payload from a couple thousand feet up and were not very accurate at hitting targets.²⁵

Easy leapfrogged ahead with Dog Company providing cover and began receiving enemy SA fire from both flanks at 0900. It then encountered mines at 0950. Dog Company, too, took enemy fire and grenades from then until the end of the day. Another airstrike, this one with "excellent results" hit the objective at 1045. A platoon from Dog was dispatched to stop enemy fire that had been striking Easy and Dog Companies from a draw. Fox moved separately at 1315 to "nose between Check Point 2 and Check Point Three."²⁶

Ralph Steele was with Fox Company that day:

. . . looked to me arbitrarily we depart from this path and we started up almost a vertical hillside. Again, it's timber. And it was one of the toughest days of my time in the service scaling that . . . almost vertical hill. You're grabbing at trees and whatnot and . . . of course there's saliva and you're getting exhausted and everybody's out of breath so nobody ahead of you says a word, but all of a sudden . . . I looked up and I'm looking at a Gook right in the face. . . . it was so horrifying I couldn't understand what I was seeing because everything on his head was in the wrong place. Well it turned out he had been shot just a few minutes before and slid down upside down and his arms are stretched out. . . . I'm [looking] at his face upside down. I remember he had a little mustache. His eyes were open. I remember him being jaundice. Really yellow looking eyes. I about crapped out when I saw that. But I didn't holler to the guys down the line, hey, there's a body here because . . . I didn't have any breath to spare. . . . I knew it was getting close to combat now because a few more paces and there was a Gook propped up against a tree with his jackets open and probably somebody from G2 . . . had been designated to go through the uniforms to find out if there was any information. But he had been shot in the chest and he was

²⁵ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

²⁶ Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6; Second battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Report of Enemy Action, and Daily Narrative of Activities.

still alive. . . . he was breathing real heavy but there was big pink bubbles coming out. Well I had been taught that that's a lung. . . . ain't going to last long when that's happening.²⁷

By 1515 Dog and Easy were on the trail in the draw between Hills 680 and 673.. Fox Company at 1610 was on the knob of the ridge between 673 and 749. Then Easy and Dog moved up 749 together to attack from the west (meanwhile Fox moved towards them from the east).

Ralph B. Steele remembered the attack:

Then within another 50 yards or so we came to the crest of a ridge and . . . when you get to the crest of the ridge over in Korea . . . [it's usually] stripped of trees from napalm strikes and artillery and then Gooks had chopped down some of the trees to make bunkers. So it was all . . . [clear] of trees, and about that time they wanted us to do was get on the other side of the ridge because we were going kind of east really and then we would turn and go north. Well, as we started to move out a bunch of mortar fire hit on the ridge that we were going to occupy, so our lieutenant very wisely says we're not going to do that. What we're going to do is we go over one at a time they'll get us one at a time. He said when I give the word we're going over all at once. . . .

. . . he was counting. It took about five seconds after they fired a round before they kicked the breech open, got another round inserted, pulled the liner, took about four to five seconds. So when the round hit . . . [he] said go, so the whole platoon at once – and you know when you're running like that it seems it takes you five minutes, but we cleared the crest just as the 76 round hit . . . [and we're] so relieved everybody's giggling and laughing. We jumped in a hole. We were all laughing about it, and one of the sergeants says, you know this is the second time this has happened to me. . . . but we moved out . . .²⁸

We were starting to come up on more and more debris of battling, a few things struck me. One was there was a machine gun, American machine gun box metal [ammo can] and there had been a concussion next to it . . . and it pushed the sides of that box in and all the bullets on the belt had poked through the metal of the side of the box . . . the guy that was carrying that, he was gone. Then one of those horrifying things . . . I . . . just turned 20. . . . here's three Gooks in a trench and a round had hit and they were buried partially, but they were looking out over this valley right there and a round had gone through, a large round [cavity] I looked at their faces because [I was young] and you always get curious. . . . I could look right through the eye sockets and see the side of the bank behind it. What the heck. His head was gone just his cervical was sticking up and his head, his face. . . . the remark when my buddy was walking right

²⁷ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

behind me was same as mine, well there's three Gooks we don't have to worry about.²⁹

Elements of these two companies were on the objective at 1710, but experiencing heavy enemy fire in an area rife with mines. Easy Company believed it had secured Checkpoint 6 at 1740. The companies were arranged around the lower nose of 749. Dog and Easy dug in for the night at these locations at 2000. Fox was still moving with Easy supporting the movement with its fire. Fox at this time was on the southwestern nub of 749's main plateau. It dug in soon after.³⁰

Steele described Fox's perimeter that night:

So then we formed up, made a perimeter that night. . . . We made this real tight perimeter and we were out from the rest of the line. We were by ourselves. We had . . . very good company commander and the Gooks attacked us that night about four times. Well, it was . . . pitch black . . . and we could hear the Gooks down in this ravine, hear them chattering . . . whoever their leader was was giving them a kind of pep talk apparently because you hear them cheer, and then he would blow a whistle and I could hear them crashing through that second row of timber. We started firing down into the ravine and the –what saved us then was our mortars were zeroed in on that thing and they called in mortar rounds, and that would break up each one of these attacks. But I remember at the time I was in a hole with . . . an squad leader sergeant, and I remember thinking how bad I didn't want to be there. That if I had it on my own, I would get up and run as fast as I could run and run all the way back to Elkhart, Indiana, but the other thing plays at the same time. That really wasn't an option . . . I could not let these guys down. That was the main thing.³¹

During the assault, PFC Donald A. Daigneault was with Dog Company 2/7 as a BAR man. His squad was to cover Dog Company's assault on Hill 673, but the squad found an "intricate net of anti-personnel mines and booby traps," and several of the Marines went down. Daigneault noticed that NKPA troops were about to descend the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress; Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6; Second battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Report of Enemy Action; Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Daily Narrative of Activities.

³¹ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress.

ridge and hit his squad while they were still stuck in the minefield. Though Daigneault himself bled from his own mine-inflicted wounds, he crawled through the rest of the minefield to meet the NKPAs and draw their fire away from the other wounded in his squad. Bursts from his BAR tore into seven enemy soldiers, killing four and wounding three others. Their companions turned tail and headed back up the ridge. Thereafter, Daigneault refused evacuation for his own wounds until he was sure the enemy was not coming again against his squad. "He was responsible for saving the lives of his comrades and for the accomplishment of his unit's Mission." For this act, Daigneault would be awarded the Navy Cross.³²

One Marine of Fox 2/7, Jim Swartzwelder, later recalled that day:

At the time, I was a squad leader. Right in front of me was one of the ammo carriers for the machinegun outfit, a guy named Jamie Marsh. They had told us to stay on the trail because each side was mined. So we were working our way up the trail, and as you go up, it's stop and go, stop and go, [like and accordion] because its so slow going up these trails. Finally we stopped and Jamie turned around and sat down—right on top of a mine. It just blew him to pieces. It blew me off of the trail, down into a gully and a small stream, which ran down the draw. And it wounded me, also. Fortunately for me, certainly not Jamie, he took all the blast . . .³³

Mines continued to be a problem even when Marines knew their location. One Marine described a night march with trip wires over the trail. "At one point each man had to hand a trip wire to the next man who had to then step over the wire, which was attached to a mine beside the trail." If that was not a nerve-wracking experience, nothing was.³⁴

Through September 12, 1800, Phase Two (so far) of the battle had cost the Marines 22 KIA and 250 WIA. The two days had been costly, and it seemed the

³² Navy Cross Award Citation for Donald A. Daigneault.

³³ Burton F. Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 337. This may be the same incident described by Steele.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 345.

Marines had taken the short end of the stick in blood. The enemy had given almost as well as he had received. Enemy dead actually counted numbered 30, and 22 prisoners were taken. Many more were estimated as KIA; the Marines had not yet had the luxury of time and absence of intense fire to go around and count so it is possible the enemy had taken greater losses.³⁵

All through the day mortar fire struck the Marines. It hit even in rear areas and the enemy was very accurate with it. Burton F. Anderson recalled:

I went back to my hole after talking to Brydon and settled in for a C-ration fruit for breakfast. Some time after 0800, the Doc, one of our corpsman [*sic*], came over to brag about his son. He stood beside my hole, telling me about his new baby boy that he had never seen and reading from a recent letter from his wife. He was a very proud papa; he knelt down to show me pictures. . . . Since the hills were alive with gooks, it is not surprising that spotters, gook observers, were behind our positions. This would have to be an explanation for a salvo right on target, particularly on the reverse slope. And yet the gooks would zero in their positions by mortars and artillery before a heavy attack. Of course, we were in holes the gooks had occupied the day before.

In any case, without warning, a gook mortar barrage salvoed into our positions. . . . After the explosions, I felt a stinging in my back [flak vests were not yet issued regularly and were still being tested]. With one hand, I reached around and could feel pieces of metal. When I looked my hand was bloody. Then I realized that the corpsman was lying there outside my hole, face down. The same mortar that landed beside my hole, landed at his feet. The front part of his body had been gutted; he was killed instantly. I looked down hill at the mortar section. Most of them had been blown out of their holes. The barrage was a direct hit. In an instant, most of the mortar section were [*sic*] killed or wounded.³⁶

The evening of September 12 marked the arrival of the 1st Marines at the front. (They had been released from X Corps reserve on September 10. They were to have been part of Task Force Able, but because that task force was never assembled and Plan Apache had been canceled, the 1st Marines was released back to parent control.) This Marine regiment relieved the 7th Marines, which was hurting from the previous

³⁵ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15, 31.

³⁶ Burton F. Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 352-53.

fighting. Marines of 3/1 and 1/1 took over the areas of 3/7 and 1/7 near Hill 673 (2/1 relieved 1/7 at first then moved to relieve 2/7). The 7th Marines would then go to corps reserve located at Wontong-ni where the roads from Inje and Kansong met.³⁷ (See Map # 13)

The Second Battalion, 7th Marines, however, was in contact with the enemy and dispersed; one of its companies was separated from the others by terrain and the enemy around Hill 749. Mortar and artillery fire were frequent on its positions. Thus 2/1, which was to relieve 2/7, could not effect that action in light of the tactical situation (one company was *reported* as on the “nose” of the ridge, north of 749, and the other was *reported* to be on the second “nose” north of 749. (See Map # 23) Another company was south of the hill and trying to reunite with the ones to the north). So 2/7 was passed to control of the 1st Marines, and scheduled to revert to parent control the next day (the tactical situation would delay this revert, however).³⁸

Enemy mortar fire came in during 2/1's approach march between 1600 and 1700 that evening, causing four casualties. Thereafter, 2/1 tied in with 2/7 for the night. The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines was designated regimental reserve. The next day's combat for this regiment would fall primarily to the 2nd and 3rd battalions, but Able Company 1/1 was attached to 2/1 the next day to reinforce it.³⁹ (See Map # 24)

The movement of the 1st Marines was not without the horrors of combat. PFC Floyd Baxter of Weapons Company 1/1 remembered:

³⁷ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 11.

³⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 186-87; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 15; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 12.

³⁹ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 12.

When we entered the valley, a young guy named Brun, who had married just before coming to Korea, was in front of me in the column. There were tanks lined up on our right. I should have known then that we were in for trouble. Tanks almost always drew fire. We went down the road some ways when all hell broke loose--enemy seventy-sixes, at regular intervals, came screaming in. One of the first blasts knocked my helmet off. I thought, Now I've got no place to hide. Then it was run and hit the deck, run and hit the deck. A shell exploded to the left. I looked up, Brun was already on his feet and running. I jumped up and followed. I ran about ten steps when I heard another shell coming in. This one didn't whistle; the sound was more like someone blowing between his teeth. Brun dove to his right, I jumped to my left. He never knew what hit him; the blast caught him full in the chest. The Marine behind me went to pieces. I believe he finished his tour in a rear-echelon administrative job.⁴⁰

PFC Frank J. Davidson of 1/1's Heavy Weapons Company, too, remembered the move up:

We approached the line in the night, and we could see the flashes and hear explosions nearby. My stomach was knotted. This was my first experience in actual combat, and I had no idea what was happening or what we could expect.

With all the noise and the explosions so near, I had a mental picture of incoming enemy artillery. The night just seemed full of it. Until we got close enough to see the guns, I didn't realize that we were moving up through our own artillery positions, and what I was hearing was our own guns firing.⁴¹

Of the experience of being relieved, Genrich, with 3/7, remarked:

The next morning they were talking about Howe Company being ready to move off the hill into a reserve area. They started letting the Marines from Howe Company go down the hill the way they had come up four [sic] days before. The Lieutenant from George Company said they didn't have a machinegun to fill our position and could we wait until they had another gun available. Richard and I stayed until another machinegun relieved us and we then went down the hill. I was carrying my machine gun down the hill I had heard that there were 27 left on the hill in Howe. Another source said 35 and one book said 45. This must have included all the stretcher-bearers who never made it back up the hill. Even today I can still picture every hill and where each man was located around me in the battle for Bloody Ridge.

An article in LIFE magazine my sister had read said the troops had looked old and haggard coming off the hill. I know that I was all smiles and even skipped a little going down the hill with the gun on my shoulder. When we got to the river there were amphibious DUKWS waiting to take us down the river. Richard and I

⁴⁰ Oral account of PFC Floyd Baxter, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 296.

⁴¹ Oral account of PFC Frank J. Davidson, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 387.

were the only ones on ours besides the operators. Most of the company had left a couple of hours earlier so we arrived later at the reserve area and didn't march in with the company or make roll call.⁴²

Day Three: September 13

The attack plan for the 1st Marines was set forth in Regimental OpnO 20-51. This order was issued on September 12, and set a timeline for relief of the 7th Marines to be completed by 2400. The First Battalion, 1/1, was initially to be in regimental reserve, ready to assume mission of either 2/1 or 3/1 as ordered. For September 13th, 3/1 and 2/1 were to attack towards the objectives 2/7 and 3/7 had been fighting for; 2/1 to seize the rest of Hill 749 (Division Objective Baker) and portions of the ridgeline that included Hills 812, 980 and 1052 (Regimental Objective Roger); 3/1 to attack and take an unnamed Hill between Hill 751 and 812 -- part of a finger ridge than ran up to Hill 1052 from the southeast --, and Hill 751. H-Hour was set for 0500.⁴³

Complications in the tactical situation meant that the 1st Marines, originally slated for an H-hour of 0500, September 13, had to wait until 0900 to attack. In addition, ammunition had to be moved up to the front for the regimental assault to begin and roads had been blocked by the enemy, and "movement of all units to their assigned positions was very slow due to heavy evacuation traffic on the trails and difficulty in locating guides and prescribed routes at night." One company of KSCs (Korean Service Corps) was added to help the regiment move supplies forward, 240 men. One technological innovation, however, kept the delay to a minimum.⁴⁴

⁴² Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

⁴³ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, OpnOr 20-51.

⁴⁴ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 187; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15; Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14.

Casualties throughout the Korean War in the Marine division had been extracted by helicopter as well as land transport, and in the rugged mountains north of the Punchbowl, helicopters were a godsend. However, these “whirlybirds” could only lift two wounded men at a time, usually in external litters. There was delay because of the heavy numbers of wounded waiting to be taken to field hospitals or battalion or regimental aid stations in the rear (but the choppers made up for the delay and then subtracted from it by moving tons of supplies forward as well). The “chopper” helped save many wounded Marines who otherwise would have died. One estimate was that as little as thirty minutes passed from a Marine’s actual wounding to the time of his arrival at a triage point over seventeen miles to the rear. (If he was one of the lucky ones who got to be evacuated by chopper. Chopper evacuation was not always or even usually the method utilized in combat.)⁴⁵ (See Photo # 4)

Wadie Moore received both stretcher and helicopter evacuation:

“‘Wrap him in a poncho,’ Doc said. Then it was bumpity-bump-bump down that hill with somebody dragging me in that poncho. Oh, it was cold! Surely this ride will be over soon. Then we came to this stream and the communists were throwing mortars into that thing until you’d think they were going to blast all the water out of it.”

After being dropped and abandoned by his Blue Boy porters, Moore heard the sergeant directing the helicopter evacuation of wounded holler, “Get that man floating downriver—get him !” Marines dragged him to the side of the water and soon he was strapped in a basket whizzing through the air on the 90-mile trip back to adequate hospital care for the seriously wounded.

“In those days the choppers were so frail they had to have a dummy for ballast opposite the wounded. It wasn’t necessary in this case as my old friend Ed DeFlice served that purpose. We shared the coldest ride of our lives.”⁴⁶

That same day, Operation Windmill I (named after the code name for 3/1), the first battlefield helicopter resupply operation in any war, commenced when helicopters

⁴⁵ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 187, 190; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16.

⁴⁶ Mackey Murdock, *The Forgotten War: Texas Veterans Remember Korea*, 106.

brought a whole day's worth of supplies to 2/1, bypassing seven miles of harsh terrain. It took 28 flights, but this was accomplished in only 2.5 hours. The amount of supplies amounted to 18,848 pounds essential to the assaulting battalions. Meanwhile, seventy-four casualties were evacuated via the return trips.⁴⁷

"Making their deliveries close to the top and on the reverse slopes of high terrain the helicopters greatly aided the attacking units." However, this was not something the infantry could count on every day. "Resupply by helicopter could be had only in emergencies and when the regular supply routes were either exhausted or not trafficable."⁴⁸

The usual method of extraction for wounded was by stretcher. PFC Frank O. Hart was a Marine with 2/1 that day:

Before we relieved the 7th Marines on Hill 749, we were pressed into service as stretcher bearers for them. I was helping carry a stretcher with a man who had a serious leg wound, and as we were carrying him we kept getting stray rounds of small-arms fire. A spent round hit the wounded man's good leg and just dropped into the stretcher without doing any damage. I thought at the time how ironic it would have been for this poor guy to get hit in his good leg just as he was being carried out, presumably getting out of harm's way.⁴⁹

Before being relieved this day, elements of 2/7 went again into the attack to contact the rest of 2/7's elements still on the hill. Fox 2/7 stepped out at 0500. At 0545, the report was received that 2/1 was moving in to relieve them from Hill 673. Fox and Easy were trying to close the gap between themselves to create a perimeter and were

⁴⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 187-190; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 16-17; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," daily Intelligence Summaries.

⁴⁸ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14.

⁴⁹ Oral account of PFC Frank O. Hart, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 387.

still attempting this movement at 0700. Enemy fire was heavy and bogged the units down.⁵⁰

Ralph B. Steele was with Fox in the assault:

Then the next morning we jump off and we—again, we don't know what the situation [is]. We don't know if the Gooks had pulled out or what until. . . . Well, it turned out they hadn't, so we had to make an attack and we came up. . . . A Napalm canister burned up, tin was there and we were being brought up and we were trying to envelop this positions, and the lieutenant was releasing the guys one at a time. And to me this was the moment of truth because when these guys would run across there you could see the dirt popping up from being fired from this bunker. . . . We had a machine gun back here that was firing into that bunker. When [the lieutenant] heard that machine gun fire he would release us. That way momentarily they ducked and we would have a better chance of getting across. Again, the same lieutenant that released us in mass in another tactical situation. That's why those aren't dumb guys that are wearing—for the most part wearing those bars. This guy was clever. He had a different tactical problem, and nobody's coaching him. We're 18, 20 year old kids and this guy's a 23, 24-year old man. . . . So anyway, that's me running here and I thought because they couldn't get their guns depressed, if I can get to that Napalm tin, I'll have it made. . . . So we got there. Here's where a brave thing happens. This is what makes boot camp training professionalism absolutely witness to good training. We were pinned down. I and the rest of our squad had our heads as close to the ground as we could on account of this bunker firing, but the platoon sergeant came up on his knees and commanded return that fire. We jumped up or stood up, stand up, came up on our knees as one and returned that fire and got fire supremacy. Would I do that today? I would say are you nuts? . . . No. Training. Number one, tremendous act of bravery. I mean, that's —command initiative from a sergeant, doesn't get any medal, you know. And he's right in the face of that fire commanded to us, return that fire. Again, our training was so good we didn't think except to return that fire.⁵¹

Fox finally contacted elements of 2/1 at 1220 and began heading for the rear. Dog attacked at 1430. It and Easy were “continually receiving heavy enemy mortar, small arms, and automatic fire.”

The Marines of 2/1 were supposed to relieve the rest of 2/7, but these elements (companies Dog and Easy) were thought to be on the reverse slope of Hill 749. Both 2/1

⁵⁰ Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6.

⁵¹ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress.

and the last companies of 2/7 had a hot fight on their hands for the rest of the daylight hours. Clearly 749 was no enemy outpost, but a key position in his MLR.⁵²

Dog contacted 2/1 at 1825, and 2/1 reported it had relieved all 2/7 elements. However, withdrawal of Dog and Easy was impeded at 2200 by heavy enemy incoming. It took them an hour and a half to finally start for the rear.⁵³

From the perspective of 2/1, the same action described above for 2/7 was reported as follows. The relief of Fox 2/7 (the company on the south part of 749 – see Map # 23) by 2/1 ended by 1100. (Whereupon Fox 2/7 began to withdraw), but 2/1 ran into at least one enemy counterattack at 0820 while getting there. The passage of lines (and relief) by 2/1 through 2/7 began by 0915.⁵⁴

Subsequently, 2/1 commenced the assault at 1200 with Easy Company in the lead supported by “a very close air strike, 81mm mortars and HMG platoon. Tanks were firing on located enemy bunkers on south slopes of Hill 812 and Objective BAKER.” Going was rough right off the bat. Easy Company “gained the crest of Hill 749 at 1210 and was driven off by murderous enemy mortar and hand grenade fire. At 1230, 2/7 coordinated close in support of 2/1’s attack on Hill 749 with the aid of 60mm mortars and small arms.”⁵⁵

Adequate air support did not arrive to help 2/1 in its assault. “After the jump off it was immediately apparent from the heavy volume of mortar, automatic weapons, small arms fire and the hail of grenades employed by the enemy, that further air strikes would

⁵² 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 13; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 190; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16.

⁵³ Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, Daily Narrative of Activities.

⁵⁴ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 12.

⁵⁵ Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 6.

be essential. The 2dBn was receiving very heavy casualties at this time. Air did not arrive on station, so the battalion resumed the attack on Hill 749 at 1430 and continued to meet a fanatical enemy defending his positions to the death.” While CAS was no genie in the bottle that would make any assault bloodless, it was an effective weapon that could have further softened the objective and saved some lives by exchanging steel for blood. And the greatest benefit of all was that it scared the enemy into keeping his head down longer and more effectively than anything else—the NKPA were very fearful of Napalm—and this saved more friendly infantry lives in an attack. “. . . then they called in the planes and they didn’t even have to make a strike. They just started orbiting the neighborhood and then of course the Gooks fell silent then because they didn’t want to be on a Napalm attack.” They NKPA were not nearly as afraid of artillery as they were of air strikes. CAS was a very effective, morale-crushing weapon. “Enemy morale [was] poor, afraid of napalm but adequate[ly] dug in against artillery. . . .”⁵⁶

Hill 749 was still an enemy-manned fortress. “The enemy were emplaced in camouflaged bunkers, well over-headed and connected by trenches; in addition many of these positions were tunneled, giving the forward and reverse slopes of Hill 749 a honey combed effect.” The tunnels could be used by an enemy to re-man a bunker even after the Marines thought they had knocked it out. Furthermore, the forward slope defenses were only partially neutralized by 3.5 inch rockets (bazookas) and artillery.⁵⁷ (See Photo # 5)

⁵⁶ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 12; Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress; First Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 36. See Chapter on Close Air Support.

⁵⁷ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 12.

Besides the mines, Hill 749 was one tough defensive network. It was part of one of the “T” shaped ridges, and the enemy had taken maximum advantage of the terrain in his defense. The right-angle ridges were murderously effective defensive bulwarks providing a strength similar to that of inland defenses on Iwo Jima, Peleliu, and Okinawa. “Attackers fighting their way up the leg of the ‘T’ came under deadly crossfire from the head of the imaginary letter—a transverse ridgeline bristling with mortars and machine guns positioned in bunkers.”⁵⁸

Even in the hell of this battle, some Marines still had a sense of humor. Navy Corpsman Joe Havens with 2/1 remembered: “The first North Korean I saw was a dead one. Left so we newcomers would see him, he was propped up in a sitting position in a bend on one of the trails on Hill 749. He held in one hand a dead man’s poker hand of aces and eights.”⁵⁹

Some reports from other elements of the division deemed support from both air and artillery adequate that day, but past a certain geographic point, 2/1 could not utilize either freely lest they inadvertently hit 2/7’s remaining men. The “cannon cockers” of the 11th Marines (and X Corps artillery like the 780th FAB, Battery “C”) expended 2,133 rounds of artillery. Marines used 4.2 inch mortars abundantly that day as well. These fired 261 HE (High Explosive) and 28 WP (White Phosphorous “Willie Pete”) rounds in the day’s fighting. Engineers helped the advance by clearing mine fields. Charlie Company 1st Tank Battalion, fired 720 rounds, which resulted in the destruction of six NKPA bunkers.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 192; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 18.

⁵⁹ Oral account of Hospitalman Joe Havens of Dog Company, 2/1 in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 300.

⁶⁰ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 14, 16.

Tanks also provided valuable, “bunker busting” capability where they were able to be moved into supporting position in the steep, rocky terrain. The 1st Mar Div had a battalion of tanks organic to it, the 1st Tank Battalion (1/Tank), and their 90mm guns could provide flat trajectory, highly accurate fire on targets far beyond the range of mortars and recoilless rifles. However, in this area northeast of the Punchbowl, tanks were limited by terrain as to the amount of support they could offer.⁶¹

Easy’s resumed attack had the “maximum support of 81mm mortars, light and heavy MGs and fixed bayonets.” At 1500, 2/1 plunged through a “hail of enemy hand grenades, mortar, small arms and automatic weapons fire to encounter the enemy in their positions.” This fighting entailed bayonet and hand to hand combat in order to secure the summit of 749, “the southern extremity of the 1st Marine Division’s Objective BAKER.”⁶²

The Marines of 2/1 made the crest with generous use of grenades and small arms. Grenades hissed as their fuses ignited, BARs growled their guttural ire and spat out streams of full-auto .30-06 slugs, M-1 Garand rifles “pinged” as their 8 round clips ejected from the rifles and bolts snapped shut on fresh loads. Smoke and dust and mud and fire stung the eyes and choked in the throat as men tried to breath in a red cloud of fury. Men closed with the enemy in narrow trenches and muddy gun pits to contest for one another’s lives with the butt of a rifle, or the honed steel of a bayonet punching through a dirty cotton uniform to eviscerate the soft flesh beneath. Dark blood splattered wetly on rocks and stained the earth with a new sticky mud as old as humanity. Grimy, bone-weary Marines with parched throats and eyes ancient for their youth emerged

⁶¹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16.

⁶² 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 13.

survivors from the fray and tried to gather the will and scrape up the energy to do it all over again if the enemy should counterattack (he usually did). “Ammo up!” the call went out. Bullets were more important than water. Marines lowest in rank gritted their teeth and staggered off for the supply point. The others shook all too light canteens for a precious few drops to drink and cut their intense thirst. But in the Korean War, the Marine Corps enforced “water discipline,” meaning it was strictly rationed and scarce, men could not drink their fill. This may seem ironic since the Marine Corps in later times would demand that each man drink almost constantly to “hydrate.”

The Marines were now on top, but Hill 749 was far from secure. The wooded slopes contained many more enemy fortifications. And with 2/1 on the summit, the companies of 2/7 on the reverse slope were less than 400 yards away. Nevertheless, it was not until 2025 that the mission to relieve these companies could be effected. The Marines of 2/1 would have to again dispute every inch of intervening ground with the determined enemy in “fierce bayonet and hand to hand combat.” Even then, an estimated 80 enemy remained hidden in bunkers about the hill. The 2nd Battalion 1st Marines would need to reorganize and ready itself to fight on. Soon it was apparent that the remaining elements of 2/7 were not where they were reporting themselves to be. Confusion among its leaders in the fog of war had led to the mistake. Marines of 2/1 finally found the rest of 2/7 to the left and rear of its lines when they had expected them at their front.⁶³ (See Map # 23)

Dog Company passed through Easy 2/1 soon after the former had made the crest of 749, and pushed the attack, still trying to make contact with the missing elements of

⁶³ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 13; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16.

2/7, reported to be to the front of 2/1 (they were actually behind at this point). At 1612, Dog “was engaged with a fiercely resisting enemy,” but was moving forward slowly. However, it could not use maximum supporting arms for fear of hitting the still missing elements of 2/7. Soon, enemy counterattacks hit the Dog Company Marines from the ridgeline leading north from 749 towards 812, but by 1820, Dog Company found 2/7’s last elements. These were located to its rear, not its front, and had moved to meet them from the southwest. “At this time, it became evident that there was, in fact, no friendly elements of 2/7 on the high ground of . . . [Hill 749] as had been continually and specifically reported throughout the course of the day.”⁶⁴

Dog Company received orders at 1830 to hold ground gained, “and to register in supporting arms immediately in order to repel any expected counterattack in strength.” Companies Easy and Fox 2/1 moved forward then to tie in a perimeter defense with Dog. (See Map # 25 for positions.) Positions were dug in by 2000. The elements of 2/7 left for the rear at this time. Just among 2/1, the casualties were heavy (4 KIA and 224 WIA).⁶⁵

With the mission to relieve 2/7 done, the elements of 2/7 under control of the 1st Marines were released back to them at 2025. That night, 2/1, too, fought off enemy counterattacks. Come morning, it would resume the assault.⁶⁶

PFC Frank Hart of 2/1, described digging in that evening on Hill 749:

After we secured Hill 749—we gave it our own name, Bloody Ridge—in the late afternoon of September 13, we had to dig in to receive the expected counterattack from the gooks. My Bunkie, Tom Hull, and I had a long discussion about where we should dig. I was sure I had just the perfect spot. A huge hemlock tree had been uprooted by artillery fire, and I was trying to tell Tom that

⁶⁴ Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶⁶ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3.

this was the A-1 spot because we could use the tree trunk as a natural parapet. But Tom was adamant and kept insisting that we dig in about twenty feet behind the uprooted tree.

I just couldn't understand his reasoning, but after arguing about it for ten minutes I gave in—mainly because he had been in Korea for about two months, and I had just arrived.

Five minutes after we started digging, two Marines from our platoon came along and spotted that big uprooted hemlock, and *they* said, "That's the perfect spot" and started digging.

About an hour after we were all dug in, a gook artillery barrage began. These two Marines who had "my" hemlock tree took a direct hit from a mortar. One of them was killed outright, and the other was barely breathing when we dug him out. I doubt he lived. I just thank the Good Lord for giving Tom Hull the persistence to talk me out of it.

The gooks were artists with mortars. They probably had that hemlock tree registered and were just waiting for some Marines to move in.⁶⁷

The Third Battalion 1st Marines (3/1), to 2/1's left (on Hill 680—they had finished the relief there of 3/7 at 1235), was slated to take Battalion Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4, which were stepping stones to taking Hill 751 (Regimental Objective Sugar), and the ridgeline that included Hill 1052 (Regimental Objective Roger), but this mission was complicated by the fact that strong enemy firepower still remained on 749. (For positions, see Map # 26.) These enemy emplacements could subject a force attacking 751 to first oblique, then enfilade flanking fires as it advanced. (This fire, because of the height of the enemy emplacements, would be plunging as well as grazing fire with the beaten zones being just about anywhere an attacking Marine could hope to hide.) The attack was scheduled for 0900 but was delayed by regimental order "pending air for further reduction of enemy positions," and "by order of the Regimental S-3 because the

⁶⁷ Oral account of PFC Frank O. Hart, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 387-88.

2nd Battalion was unable to effect relief by that time” – the two battalions were intended to attack concurrently and with coordination, not piecemeal.⁶⁸

The attack did not resume until 1315. The air support, as usual, was late and ineffective. Nevertheless, 3/1 attacked towards 751 and encountered heavy concentrations of AP (anti-personnel) mines, though enemy fire was light at first. George and Item Companies were in the lead. How Company remained in Battalion Reserve on Hill 680. Item was to seize Battalion Objectives 1 and 3; George, Battalion Objectives 2 and 4. The enemy resistance remained light for Item until 1600. Thereafter enemy fire became so intense it brought the Company to a halt. George Company on the other hand found extensive booby traps and mines in its area. It, too, met heavy fire as it neared its objectives and was ordered to dig in for the night in its present positions at dusk, about 400 yards short of Objective 2.⁶⁹ (See Map # 25)

Item Company continued its attack and “was able to envelope the enemy positions on Objective 1 shortly after dark . . .” But by 2030, Item too had dug in for the night.⁷⁰

Spike Selmyhr of George Company, 3/1, was wounded that day. It was his most vivid battle of his Korean service. He recalled about the enemy that “The enemy that I saw were young, generally tenacious and determined fighters. They fought differently than us in that they seemed to have less concern for any casualties they might suffer in a headlong charge. Not too much finesse.”⁷¹

He went on:

⁶⁸ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2, 12, 13; Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 9; Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3.

⁶⁹ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2; Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3-4.

⁷⁰ Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 4.

⁷¹ Interview Transcript, Garlen L. “Spike” Selmyhr, 2000.

There were heavy concentrations of small arms and automatic weapons fire skillfully used to cover avenues of approach to their [the enemy] positions. They made good use of camouflage, and were tenacious in holding their positions, although there was little initiative on the part of subordinates. During the attack . . . [against Kanmubong Ridge], my platoon was driving along a very narrow ridge line covered with trees and brush. We began to receive small arms and automatic weapons fire on Hill 751, and I moved forward to encourage the men and to direct their fire and maneuver.⁷²

He exhibited a great example of one principle of leadership on the small-unit level, that the officers should be up front:

A major difficulty in battle is the total confusion of noise, shouting, the crack of bullets, and making sure the troops know where their officers are and that they are sharing their danger. If the officers are all down behind rocks, trees, etc., and say "Go get 'em" or "charge," no one is going to go. However, if as the leader one stands up and says, "Let's go," they will all go. The tough part is that when the first person stands up (the officer), he feels as if a large bull's eye has been painted on his body.⁷³

Many Marine Lieutenants were felled in such a way, but someone, even if it was an NCO and not an officer, was expected to fill that role if an officer fell to enemy fire.

Selmyhr's account continues:

When the firing intensified, I threw myself down into the prone position and received a bullet in my left shoulder. There was not a lot of pain, and when I tried to move my arm I found that it worked fine, so I again moved forward behind the leading squad. The firing was pretty brisk, and the troops were doing well in returning the fire and in moving to covered and concealed positions. Maybe ten or fifteen minutes later, I saw a North Korean come out from behind some rocks and start to point his rifle at me. He was about 30 yards away from me when I shot him. I had reacted to the small arms and automatic weapons fire from the enemy by directing the fire of my troops and encouraging them, and by dropping the enemy I faced. After that, I was in a prone position looking for a target. I picked what I thought was an arm or shoulder of an enemy and as I moved my head to the right to look through my sights (about 2-3 inches), I took a bullet that entered my left cheek and in grazing fraction exited behind my left ear, taking out part of the mastoid bone. The shock was as if someone had hit me with a baseball bat. No pain, but lots of blood. I do not know whether it was a stray round, a machine gun round, or a rifle round. God knows why, but I tried to stand

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

up and discovered that the damage to my inner ear was such that I had no sense of balance. I immediately fell down.

At that time, Sergeant English from the machine gun platoon came out and said, "Lieutenant, put your arm around my neck and I'll walk you back behind the ridge line to first aid." I told him to get the hell out of there as bullets were flying around us. He ignored the remark, and with my arm around his neck we walked back maybe 25-30 yards with bullets kicking up dust around our feet and clipping leaves from the trees overhead. Neither of us was touched again. "War Hero" is a term tossed about too freely, in my opinion. A war hero to me is someone who does something beyond the normal. He does something dangerous that he might not normally choose to do to execute a mission or to save another Marine, but it must be above the *normal* responsibilities. Sergeant English fits that perception. He came out to assist me under a hail of small arms fire when I was hit.

. . . We got to a corpsman who took off my helmet, looked at my head wound, and then covered his face with his hands and said, "Oh MY God!" I took that as a discouraging word. I had no idea how badly I was hit. I just knew I was bleeding a lot. He bandaged me up and they put me on a stretcher to evacuate me. I refused to go until some of my men who had been wounded were taken away first. Evacuation of the dead was not a priority at that time. . . . I was damn lucky, even though I had been wounded. The instant I was hit in the head, I had just moved my head to the right about two or three inches to look through the sights of my weapon. Had I not done so, that shot would have been right between the head lamps. When I was evacuated, I really hated leaving my buddies behind. . . .⁷⁴

After that, the Lieutenant who had replaced Selmyhr was killed the next day. (This man's wife gave birth to a son a month later.) The man that replaced *him* fell WIA the day after that. Selmyhr's evacuation took over seven hours via Korean stretcher bearers. (Not all wounded got to be evacuated via helicopter.) He was then flown by plane to Seoul, then by train to a MASH hospital. They did not treat his wounds properly there, and his shoulder almost developed gangrene. From there, he went aboard another train to Pusan and the Navy Hospital ship *Repose*. Eventually, he was taken to Yokosuka, Japan, and a Navy hospital.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Platoon Sergeant William Gaul of Item Company 3/1 had led his platoon well that day. His platoon had been on point through the “torturous drive by his company against a fanatically defended, enemy-held key position on commanding ground.” Gaul lost no men in getting to the base of the objective, though his men inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, and he exposed himself time and again to enemy fire while spearheading an assault up almost 800 yards of steep slope. His example encouraged his men, and he ever exhorted them to push on.⁷⁶

After dark, while it was still evening, and before the Marines of 3/1 had secured defensive positions (they were still advancing on the hill), the assaulting units were pinned by a swarm of flashing green tracers from enemy machine gun fire, “emanating from a strategically located and seemingly impregnable bunker.” Platoon Sergeant Gaul was again an example of courage. He charged the bunker and lobbed grenades through the ports, killing two NKPA and wounding six others. His men were then able to continue the advance.⁷⁷

Later, another platoon needed supporting fire and Gaul immediately set up a LMG (Light Machine Gun) and fired effectively enough for that platoon to advance. “Consistently maintaining superb control to assure maximum fire power and, at the same time, provide the best possible cover and concealment for each individual, he pressed on in his unfaltering determination to overrun and destroy the aggressors and, after the objective had been seized, hastily positioned his men in a defensive perimeter and continued to direct their efforts in driving off each succeeding counterattack

⁷⁶ Navy Cross Award Citation for William Marshall Gaul.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

launched by the enemy.” Gaul was mortally wounded in repulsing enemy counterattacks the night of September 14.⁷⁸

Nightfall did not mean a truce between combatants in Korea. The Marines had mortar fire incoming throughout, besides the multiple enemy assaults of company strength on 3/1’s positions. Ten counterattacks by over 300 enemy kept the 3/1 Marines embattled, and these were finally repulsed with heavy combat. At 2100 both George and Item Companies were hit by what were estimated as platoon-sized enemy attacks. (Later, when dead enemy officers were found, it was discovered the attacks were of company strength.) Item Company would have three such attacks before 0030, while George Company received seven, the last being at 0430. In the meantime, How Company, which had moved west from 680 to dig in for the night about a thousand yards east of George Company, took artillery fire on their positions during the night.⁷⁹

As intense as the action was for the defenders, the attackers were cut down in heaps. “The fighting was so bitter that the slopes in front of the 3rd battalion positions were littered with enemy equipment and enemy dead at light of dawn.” The enemy casualties in front of 3/1 were: 90 counted KIA and an estimated 170 WIA. Friendly casualties for the entire previous day for 3/1 were 7 KIA and 46 WIA.⁸⁰

It was around September 13 when the enemy saw need to relieve the 1st NKPA Division due to the abundant casualties sown within its ranks by the Marines. The 91st

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2; Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 4.

⁸⁰ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3, 14; Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 4.

Regiment, 45th NK Division was ordered to counterattack and take back the ground lost the last few days.⁸¹

Enemy losses for the day were 14 counted KIA, 85 estimated KIA (those from the night's actions would be counted the next day), 60 estimated WIA, and 19 POWs. The Marine Division reportedly lost 12 KIA, 88 WIA (and 5 WIA among the KMCs).⁸²

However, there is discrepancy in these numbers. Just one battalion, 2/1, reported its losses for the day as 4 KIA and 224 WIA. Given that the battalion was a smaller unit and probably therefore had a better idea of how many it had lost, it is probably safe to assume that 2/1 knew how many losses it had (the Historical Diary for the month was written weeks later when dual reports and confusion of combat had had time to be ironed out). Possibly, too, the 2/1 assessment had included Marines who had been hit but just bandaged themselves and continued fighting, and the Division report was just casualties actually evacuated. (Yet the discrepancy is worsened when one notes that the Regimental Historical Diary for the 1st Marines lists the number of casualties for the day for the entire regiment as only 3 WIA, a grossly inaccurate statement in light of the battalion reports.)⁸³

With the casualties for the day from the rest of the 1st Marines's battalions added in, the total of losses climbs to 270 WIA, and 11 KIA. Then the 7th Marines's known losses (the only losses recorded are for 2/7) raise it again, this time to 18 KIA and 357 WIA. If a similar underestimation of casualties taken in the division is true of even just a few other days in the period, then the losses for the battle may very well be drastically

⁸¹ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸³ Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 14.

higher than even General Thomas realized when he told the AF that inadequate CAS had cost him lives.

However, in the case of at least one Marine, the KIA count could be erroneous, “I usually received three or more letters a week and couldn’t understand what was wrong. Everyone was getting mail but me. It had been a week or over since last mail call. I waited a few more days then went and complained. About two days later, I received about seven letters marked KIA on them. I guess that since we came back late and never made roll call, they thought I was a casualty.” But, it should be noted again, the Historical Diaries were written a month after the actions involved, so time was there to correct such errors in the final report.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Oral Memoir of Jon Charles Genrich.

CHAPTER 8

TO HOLD BACK THE NIGHT

Day Four: September 14

The 1st Marines opened its bloodiest day of the battle by resuming the attack at 0830 and 0900. The order was given in Regimental Frag Order 132247. It basically stated to continue the attacks of the previous day with 1/1 moving forward to an assembly area in preparation of passing through 2/1 to continue the attack. Enemy artillery and mortar incoming was accurate and plentiful, while machine gun fire peppered the air above the Marines with slashing green tracers, the Communist signature. The bunkers in this area were densely spaced and mutually supporting with interlocking fields of fire. Against this steel rain, 2/1 and 3/1 infiltrated forward, 2/1 on Hill 749, 3/1 towards 751. The 1st Battalion moved to an assembly area, then to a point near Hill 673 where it would dig in for the night. It would still be regimental reserve for a while. (Able Company 1/1, which had been attached to 2/1 since 2225 the night before for defensive purposes, reverted to parent control at 0900.)¹

For 2/1, the attack was once again on 749. The northern portion of 749 was wooded, heavily covered with foliage, and this presented a painful problem. The bunkers among the trees each had to be eliminated. The Marines of 2/1 had to take them one at a time. The Marines of Fox 2/1 passed through Dog Company to lead the

¹ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, Frag Order 132247; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 17-18; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15.

assault. They “jumped off” at 0930, and met heavy resistance. While Fox attacked, Easy 2/1 moved to the spur of 749 leading south east to secure the right flank.²

“Heavy frontal and flanking” small arms and automatic fire scythed into Marine ranks from the head and leg of the “T” shaped ridge line. The direction of the attack was to the northwest where the ridgeline ran towards Hill 812. “This attack moved North along the ridge line leading from Hill 749 in the face of a most stubborn enemy and well-emplaced bunkers mutually supporting, and, together with the cross-fire of the enemy thus emplaced and extremely difficult terrain the forward movement of the attacking elements was stopped at 1530.” The attack ground to a halt. The enemy called in mortar and artillery fire on his own positions every time the Marines got close. After the attack bogged down, 2/1 called in every scrap of artillery and air it could allocate to deluge the objective before continuing the assault.³

Corporal Matthew Dukes of Fox Company, 2/1, moved with the point platoon as a Fire Team Leader to root out a sniper that had fired on his men. He charged forward alone in pursuit of the sniper. A bullet hit him in the face, ruining his left eye, but nevertheless, he maintained his assault, crawling across forty yards of open terrain. He then single-handedly destroyed the sniper with shots from his M-1 rifle. He was bleeding profusely by this time but refused to seek aid. He continued with his unit in the assault and helped seize the hill and dig in. Only then did Dukes start back towards an aid station. Enroute, he spotted another wounded Marine in an exposed area. Dukes

² 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 15; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 17-18; Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 7.

³ Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 7; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3, 15.

braved intense enemy fire to reach the fallen Marine, and lifted him on his back to cover. Corporal Dukes would receive the Navy Cross.⁴

Another Marine was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for action that day. PFC Edward Gomez was an Ammunition Bearer for Easy Company, 2/1. He continuously exposed himself in the assault of 749 in order to keep his MG well supplied with ammo. Three enemy soldiers leapt from a bunker right in front of his gun crew, turning machine gun fire toward Gomez and the other Marines. Gomez dropped to one knee and tossed a grenade in their midst, then ripped a burst into them from his carbine. He was heard to holler, "If Third Section can't take this mole hill, nobody can!" The Marines made it to the top of the hill and began to dig in among enemy bunkers some of which proved to be still occupied, or reoccupied via underground tunnels. His section came under intense fire from these positions.⁵

"As his squad deployed to meet an imminent counterattack, he voluntarily moved down an abandoned trench to search for a new location for the gun and, when a hostile grenade landed between himself and the weapon, shouted a warning to those around him as he grasped the activated charge in his hand. Determined to save his comrades, he unhesitatingly chose to sacrifice himself and, diving into the ditch with the deadly missile, absorbed the shattering violence of the explosion in his own body." One Marine remarked about Gomez, "Well, the cops in Omaha will be glad to hear that Lefty Gomez

⁴ Navy Cross Award Citation for Matthew D. Dukes.

⁵ Public Information Document by Corporal Louis Jobst, Marine Combat Correspondent, dated 2 November 1951, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, "Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952."

is dead.” But on the contrary, Omaha was very proud of Gomez and has even named a street after him.⁶

Gomez had had premonitions of his death. He told buddies in his outfit that he was going to win the Medal of Honor and wrote home to his mother that he would die in the next action and: “I am not sorry I died, because I died fighting for my country and that’s the Number One thing in everyone’s life, to keep his home and country from being won over by such things as communism.” He added for her to tell his father that he had died like the man he wanted him to be.⁷

Marine PFC Robert G. Baumeister said of Gomez’s action, “I lived with the guy night and day. You always felt that there was something different about Ed. He was cooler and more intent than most under attack. I was in that trench. I will be indebted to him for the rest of my life. I’ll never forget Ed . . . nor will anyone else who fought here.”⁸

Oscar Franco was a foxhole buddy of Gomez:

The day that my buddy, Edward Gomez was killed, we were on the push. I know “Dog” Company had been hit bad and we were called forward. We got into a hot fire fight and we were losing men. What I remember is that we set up our gun and started firing for about five or six minutes. Then the Chinese [North Koreans] started throwing grenades at us. . . .

Going up Hill 749, he [Gomez] had thrown back a grenade that had landed among us. Then he shot at three Chinese [North Koreans] that charged at us. When they threw that grenade at our gun emplacement, Gomez picked it up, pulled it into his stomach, spun his body away from the gun and fell on it. He save my life!

I don’t remember anything that happened after that. “Fanel” Gallardo (“E” Company member) says he saw me being brought down from the hill. I had Gomez’s blood on my face. He says he tried to talk to me but I wouldn’t answer. One of the guys that was helping me told him I couldn’t hear him – that I was out of it – in shock. . . .

⁶ Medal of Honor Award Citation for Edward Gomez; Oral account of Lyle Conaway, Fox Company, 2/1, in Donald Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 301. This citation and the Medal are now located in a Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. Gomez also has a street named after him there.

⁷ Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 51; Lyle Conaway in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 301-02.

⁸ Public Information Document by Corporal Louis Jobst, 2 November 1951.

They say that when Gomez got it, I picked up a carbine and tried to take the hill by myself. I don't remember that and I don't have any medals to prove that. Two-and-a-half months later, I came to in a hospital in Japan.⁹

One Marine PFC in the 1st Marines, Floyd Baxter, remembered Hill 749:

We had our version of Bloody Ridge, a place where men reached down in themselves and did the impossible—they survived. When the objective [Hill 749] was finally taken, we began to dig in our eighty-one [mortar]. A guy by the name of Jack and I were filling sandbags. Enemy mortars began to fall around us. Jack found a shallow foxhole. A round landed about ten yards away. The blast didn't hurt him, but he was so wedged in the hole, I nearly had to pry him out of it.

I believe Hill 749 will be remembered by men who were there as the battle that was won with bayonets and rifle butts—and on a couple of occasions, with bare hands.¹⁰

That evening, the Marines of 2/1 called in air strikes and one arrived and performed well. However, “another one was needed if the 2dBn was to advance.” The second strike never showed up so 2/1 consolidated and dug in for the night at 1830.

Casualties for 2/1 this day were 17 KIA and 109 WIA.¹¹ (See Map # 27)

Unrelenting combat had brought 2/1 about 300 meters further forward by nightfall, securing yet more portions of the 749 Hill Mass and this relieved pressure on 3/1, still fighting to capture 751 after dusk. The latter battalion clawed its way to the summit (though the entirety of the hill was not yet completely secure).¹²

The day's attack for 3/1 proceeded as follows. An air strike had been called for 3/1's jump off that day and it was effective. Enemy resistance was lessened, showing that CAS did indeed destroy enemy bunkers when it was present and of good quality. Item Company remained on Objective 1 while George surged forward to secure

⁹ Oral memoir of Oscar “Challo” Franco at: <http://parentseyes.arizona.edu/ecompany/ocf.html>. Website last consulted April 2007.

¹⁰ Oral account of PFC Floyd Baxter, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 306.

¹¹ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 15.

¹² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 17-18; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3, 15.

Objective 2 (part of the Hill 751 hill mass) as soon as possible. "From 0715 to 0810 two successive air strikes were run on enemy bunker positions on objective 2, and at 0830 'G' Company continued the attack, running into moderate to heavy small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire by 0910." Item Company repulsed a light probing attack at 1015, but continued to take enemy sniper fire from the front and the right flank. George continued its advance and enemy resistance began to slacken. George reported Objective 2 secure at 1400 and that there were 30 enemy KIA about the area that had been taken out by the "excellent air strikes" earlier that day. Item Company took a strong enemy counterattack from its front and both flanks at 2250.¹³

During the assault in the dark by 3/1, Sergeant James B. Southall of Item Company 3/1, led assault elements of his platoon up the steep, fire-swept slopes of Hill 751, on which little cover or concealment was to be found. Southall exposed himself to enemy fire in his attack to help eliminate the enemy from his well-entrenched positions. He ripped out rounds into the enemy from his .30 cal carbine, felling numerous NKPA. Then his weapon ran dry. He refused to fall back and get more ammo. Instead, he shouted his men onward with encouragement in the final assault on the hill. Southall directed coordinated machine gun fire, red Marine tracers flicking out in long streams against the black night and lapping at bunker firing ports and the enemy flesh that hid within them. His unit rose, inspired by Southall's example of courage, and charged the last 100 yards of the slope to crush the remaining defenders. Southall was hit badly in the wrist but refused evacuation. He remained with his platoon and organized a hasty defense, lest the enemy return in counterattack. Sure enough, the NKPA came back to

¹³ Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15. Also see chapter on Close Air Support.

retake the hill, and Southall helped repulse several attacks. His actions were instrumental in the success of his battalion. He would receive the Navy Cross.¹⁴

Charlie Company, 1/Tank (1st Tank Battalion), helped by firing 400 rounds on enemy bunkers that day. Again, the 11th Marines did as much as the terrain allowed, firing 3,029 rounds, but enemy positions on reverse slopes were almost impossible to hit with a direct enough an impact to demolish them.¹⁵

The night proved to be chilly. "The second night we spent on 749 was quite chilly. September evenings were growing cooler, and this night was the chilliest I'd known in Korea. Our packs had been left behind when we were ordered to attack the hill, and all [we] wore [was] our utilities."¹⁶

That night two enemy counterattacks crashed and broke on 3/1's positions, which held firm (one was the attack on Item Company mentioned earlier). The enemy suffered many casualties.¹⁷

The CO of 1/1, Lt Col Horace E. Knapp had been wounded that day while visiting his front lines. After his evacuation, his executive officer, Major Edgar F. Carney took over temporary command. (Noon September 16 would see Lt Col John E. Gorman replace Major Carney in command of 1/1. Afterall, the Tables of Organization specified a LtCol, not a Major, as the authorized rank to command a battalion.) Luckily that night would prove to be a quiet one for this battalion. All the other battalions of the regiment received counterattacks, some in company strength, and incessant incoming.

Preregistered artillery and mortar concentrations were key to repulsing the enemy

¹⁴ Navy Cross Award Citation for James B. Southall.

¹⁵ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 17-18; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15.

¹⁶ Oral account of PFC Frank O. Hart of Dog Company, 2/1 in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 300.

¹⁷ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 15.

attacks. “The skillful preregistration and quick adjustment of friendly artillery helped the defending Marines to disperse the enemy and inflict heavy losses.”¹⁸

Ralph Steele experienced one example of such preregistered fire, already mentioned earlier:

We had . . . very good company commander and the Gooks attacked us that night about four times. Well, it was . . . pitch black . . . and we could hear the Gooks down in this ravine, hear them chattering . . . whoever their leader was was giving them a kind of pep talk apparently because you hear them cheer, and then he would blow a whistle and I could hear them crashing through that second row of timber. We started firing down into the ravine and the –what saved us then was our mortars were zeroed in on that thing and they called in mortar rounds, and that would break up each one of these attacks.¹⁹

The Korean Marines of 1st KMC spent the day, as every other day since Yoke Ridge had been captured, patrolling forward and west of the Hays Line. They took 4 POWs that day.²⁰

Total losses for the day were: 39 KIA and 463 WIA among the American Marines with none reported from the KMCs. The enemy lost 460 estimated KIA and 405 estimated WIA. The Marines captured 7 POWs. In addition, a delayed report (from another period, probably the day before) showed 325 enemy KIA, 245 estimated KIA, and 295 estimated KIA.²¹

For the 1st Marines, the day was a bloody one. 13 KIA were incurred and 316 WIA. In addition, 25 NBCs (non-battle casualties) were taken in the regiment. Sometimes these were due to accidents, sometimes sickness—though if sickness, it had to be

¹⁸ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 193; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 17-20.

¹⁹ Ralph B. Steele Interview, Library of Congress.

²⁰ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

something fierce indeed for that man to be allowed off duty in time of imminent or ongoing combat.²²

The division intelligence section reported that the enemy was trying desperately to keep at least a division of men as a striking force in the area. This meant they would probably counterattack in force soon (the previous attacks were of a smaller scale). This “intel” proved correct. The following night, 15-16 September, would be a harrowing one.²³

Day Five: September 15

Before dawn, Item Company 3/1 had to fight off an enemy counterattack of 100-150 enemy. These NKPA were repulsed at 0105. Item used their supporting arms to good effect. It called in “extremely heavy artillery fire,” to bracket its position with 1,259 rounds fired during “a single one hour period for the company.” George, too, repulsed a light probing attack with artillery fire. Then at 0650, George Company spotted fifty enemy in the open on the ridge running between Hills 751 and 1052. The excited FO quickly brought in mortar and artillery fire for a satisfying reported 30 enemy casualties resulting. The light of dawn illumined a field of carnage around Item Company’s positions. Of the pieces still identifiable as a single man, Item counted 18 KIA and estimated that 50 enemy WIA had been removed. Item itself had taken only a single WIA that night, though two more followed from sniper-fire in a daylight patrol.²⁴

Item Company’s patrol encountered blistering enemy fire “immediately northwest of the company perimeter.” Meanwhile, George company used a “precision artillery

²² 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16.

²³ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 18.

²⁴ Third Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 4-5.

adjustment” on an enemy bunker on Hill 751 and successfully silenced one enemy MG. This company at 1450 was the recipient of an enemy counterattack in company strength covered with a heavy mortar barrage, but the Marine supporting arms shattered it. This did not stop “very accurate” enemy mortar fire that struck the company until 1800, causing 2 KIA and 23 WIA from that fire alone. The same hour, however, saw an airstrike directed by an artillery FO against enemy mortar positions on Hill 1052. These were not thought to be the same set that fired on George Company, but they were estimated to be eliminated. The pieces harassing George Company were successfully suppressed by high angle artillery missions. Tanks wiped out ten bunkers on 751 in front of George. The day saw a total of 3 KIA and 31 WIA for 3/1’s Marines, and reports came that evening that the KMCs and possibly the 5th marines would relieve 3/1 sometime soon.²⁵

September 15, during daylight hours, proved quieter than the thirteenth and fourteenth had been, but only by comparison. Marines consolidated positions and improved defenses; 3/1 was to hold for further orders and 1/1 remained in reserve. But 2/1 continued to attack. Its Marines were to finish the seizure of Hill 749 despite being dog tired – the unit had received enemy incoming all night long. This battalion was in positions indicated on Map # 27 and was trying to complete the clearing of 749.²⁶

The CO of 2/1 had requested a heavy artillery barrage to soften up the objectives. “It was very evident from the dogged enemy resistance of the previous day that maximum preparation from all supporting weapons would be required to adequately soften the objective,” said the 1st Marines’s historical diary. It went on to add some

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16.

illuminating statements, “To launch the attack against this stubbornly held enemy stronghold without benefit of adequate close air support would entail needless loss of lives.” And, “aircraft loaded with napalm and 500 pound bombs were requested throughout the day; however, only one strike at 1300 and one strike at 1650 were granted, none being loaded with 500 pound bombs.”²⁷

Furthermore, 2/1’s CO made a visit to the Regimental CO and was told to “delay H-hour until, in the opinion of the Commanding Officer, 2/1, sufficient preparatory fires had been delivered to enable the seizure of the remainder of Division Objective BAKER with minimum casualties to our troops.” But because of the poor air support, he would have to try and make do with the poor substitute of artillery, which was fired in heavy concentrations to try and complete an adequate softening of the objective.²⁸

PFC Lyle Conaway remembered that day:

Late in the morning Colonel Nihart came up and told a group of us to go back along the path we had used earlier and gather up all the ammo and stretchers we could find. Around 8:00 A. M. we’d received word that we were to continue the attack on Hill 749. While we waited, it had been a strain to have that black hill looming over us. We knew it was going to be tough. I remembered over and over, Colonel Nihart’s words “a lot of Purple Hearts. . . .”

I went down with four other people, one of whom was named McGee. He and another man explored an area near a burned-out bunker, and they both stepped on land mines. They sat in a state of shock, staring at their smoking feet. Immediately afterward, we took about ten rounds of mortar fire. The other two men with me were hit by shrapnel, both in the stomach. McGee and the other guy tried to move but kept falling over. I yelled to them to stay where they were, then dragged the two wounded men nearest me under some pine trees.²⁹

Not all Marines displayed commendable characteristics. An example follows in Conaway’s continued account:

²⁷ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16; Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8.

²⁸ Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8.

²⁹ Oral account of PFC Lyle Conaway, Fox Company, 2/1, in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 300-301.

Up the hill about 200 feet were some engineers clearing mines. I shouted to them to come down and give me a hand. They glanced at me and continued their work. I knew they had to be rear echelon types. A corpsman named Hoover and another guy carrying a stretcher ran up. The three of us went over to McGee and lifted him onto the litter. We took a few steps and the man with Hoover stepped on a mine. The blast hit Hoover in the arm and eyes, and rattled me. I shouted again to the engineers to come down and help us. They didn't budge. I tried something that usually works in combat: I *ordered* them down to me. They never moved. Now I was really pissed! I fired my rifle; the round hit between them. That was a real mistake; they just took off running in the opposite direction.

I was caught now between being very angry and scared stiff. I told Hoover and McGee to wait until I returned. I walked to the path, making marks in the earth which told me how to get back without stepping on a mine. Then I made several trips back until I got all the men out. Eventually, stretcher bearers arrived and carried the six men down the hill.³⁰

As much as the actions of one individual could inspire those around him and lead them to accomplish their objective with determination despite previously faltering advancements, the actions of one man could tear down the will of those around him to fight. Lyle Conaway described the attack on Hill 749 that day by 2/1 and one of the reasons the attack failed:

Around 5:00 P. M. there was an air strike on our objectives. We were ordered to move forward. The fight the gooks put up was really fierce. I was up with Joe Vittori. The enemy pounded us with machinegun and artillery fire. Then two Corsairs made a pass right on us. One guy stood up and waved an air panel. He was hit and went down. Vittori yelled, "Whose side are those bastards on?" One of the aircraft was so low I actually saw the bomb shackle open to release the bomb. That bomb sailed over our heads and exploded in a shallow ravine. It was too hot to wonder where the Corsairs went, but they did stop strafing us.

Then a lieutenant was hit in the thigh and began to yell, "Pull back! Pull back!" Here we were, nearly to the crest, and we were ordered back. We pulled back to our previous positions. It was still light. Everyone was confused. I saw our captain [Frederick A. Hale, Jr.] going from person to person. "What happened? What went wrong?" He had an anguished look on his face. "Why did you come back?"³¹

Fox Company would resume the assault with the Battalion CO, LtCol Franklin B. Nihart "personally coordinating the attack." When the attack commenced that evening at

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

1710 (delayed because of the very late arrival of CAS) under “extremely heavy artillery preparation,” it only made one hour of progress before heavy enemy fire stopped it. In addition, the Marines were under crossfire from enemy machine gun emplacements. The resistance was so “fanatical and tenacious that the battalion was ordered back to its previous positions.” Clearly, any further advance would be useless because of the late hour; there would not be enough time to consolidate new positions before dark. Thus the assaulting elements of 2/1 withdrew back to their former positions while artillery suppressed the enemy fire and tied in with Able Company 1/1 in the positions from the night before. Hill 749 was still partly NKPA and covered with mines. The day had cost 2/1 70 WIA.³² (See Map # 27)

The 5th Marines was ordered to help the 1st Marines, and accordingly moved to assembly areas on September 15. For 2/5, the situation was SNAFU (situation normal all _ _ _ _ed up) because rain commenced falling during the unit's movement. One Marine said “Now everything's normal: a typical 2nd Battalion moving day!” The new CP (command post) set up in terrain typical of that in the valleys along the Soyang River: low, terraced rice-paddies, overgrown with tall grass near the rain-swollen, muddy river. Also typical of the area, the road was a rutted, muddy trail that was hardly passable, with mud holes deep enough in places to entrap even bulldozers from forward movement. Supply would be almost entirely by Korean cargadores of the KSC (Korean Service Corps), newly formed from the former CTC (Civilian Transport Corps) to be under ROK government and military authority in order to improve efficiency. These

³² Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8-9; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 16; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 191-92; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 18; 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3; Second Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 9.

laborers, many sick and old, would serve with distinction in honor through intense hard work, even under fire. Some did, however, commit dishonorable acts. For instance, on the night of September 19, some laborers carrying mortar rounds were discovered to have lightened their load by dropping one every now and then along the trail. But there is no evidence in the sources included in this study that this was a standard action of most KSC workers. "Without the help of these carriers . . . the supply of the line companies would have been next to impossible."³³

Division OpnO25-51 provided a plan for the 5th Marines to pass through 3/1 on September 16 and continue the assault on Kanmubong Ridge. Marines of 3/1 were then to relieve 1/1 as regimental reserve. The Marines of 1/1, after being relieved, would pass through 2/1 and attack 749 once again. The 1st KMC, along with the Division Reconnaissance Company, would replace the 5th Marines on the Hays Line (Yoke Ridge). The 7th Marines was to maintain its role as corps reserve in Wontong-ni.³⁴

Casualties were 15 KIA and 31 WIA American Marines, and no reported KMC casualties. The enemy lost 33 counted KIA, 130 estimated KIA (163 total), and 403 estimated WIA. Marines took 29 POWs.³⁵

Day Six: September 16

At 0001, 16th September, the NKPA hit 2/1 on Hill 749 with an ambitious and determined counterattack under cover of night. (This was the 91st Regiment, 45th NKPA Division, III Corps that had come into the area just a few days before.) The ensuing

³³ Second Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 25-26, 60; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 192.

³⁴ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 19; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4.

³⁵ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 19.

firefight lasted until 0400 and was preceded by a saturating deluge of enemy mortar and artillery preparation. The 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary" for September reported that this barrage, "reached an intensity that was estimated to surpass that of any barrage yet encountered by the 1st Marine Division in Korea."³⁶

The companies of 2/1 were already reduced by casualties from the previous days, but the artillery pounded away on their positions, regardless. Enemy fire was of large diameter shells: 76 mm, 105mm, and 122mm were received. The enemy mortar fire was of the 82mm and 120mm variety. (The Communists had deliberately made their 82mm mortar tubes one millimeter larger in diameter than that of the Americans so they could use American mortar shells, but the Americans, if trying to use captured Communist mortar rounds, could not follow suit.)³⁷

"Flares could be seen illuminating the front lines and the rattle of small arms exchanged by troops on both sides of the line shattered the silence of the night."³⁸

Like the CCF, the NKPA used bugles and whistles to signal its tactical movements, and these shrill and clamoring sounds could be most unnerving in the dead of night to American troops crouched in fox holes. For this reason, the Marines had trained all its replacements, while in cold weather training at Pickle Meadows in Northern California, utilizing whistles and bugles in night attacks by a simulated enemy to try to inure them to this effect. That early morning of September 16th was no different in that the NKPA attack (in regimental strength) was punctuated by a cacophony of such

³⁶ 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 19-20; First Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 16; First Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 192; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3.

³⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 192; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 19-20.

³⁸ Third Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6.

sounds. (The North Koreans would also yell things in English at the Marines as they attacked like: "Harry Truman eats shit!!" And, "Marines die, we die, all die!") The Marines brought the enemy attacks, five waves, each attacking through the one before it, to a halt with determination and spirit. The NKPA would have to get used to the idea that the Marines were no pushovers and that Hill 749 was Marine territory. "Although during the attack, ammunition supply became critical, at no time was the perimeter defense penetrated. Elements of the battalion were successfully shifted during the attack to replace casualties inflicted by the enemy."³⁹

PFC Lyle Conaway remembered the beginning of the attack:

We dug in, knowing the gooks would counterattack. It got dark. Word came down, "Get Vittori's BAR and a rifleman forward." I could see our squad leader in his hole about forty yards away. I shouted the message to him. Then I yelled that I'd go with Joe. In a few minutes Vittori came by. I strapped on ammo and stuffed my pockets with grenades. I also had a Thompson submachine gun as well as my M-1.

It was quite black by the time we got to the point. I made a mental note that the heavy machine gun was seven holes away. In between were some light machine guns and BARs with riflemen. Up toward the heavy was the artillery FO's position.

The moon came out and lit the area. I remember, too, there was a wind blowing.

We began to get probed, and so as not to give away our positions by firing, we threw grenades. Word was passed back to get more grenades up front. They were promptly delivered by Sergeant Kesler, our platoon sergeant, who missed us and walked into no-man's-land. We shouted for him to come back. Someone said, "Hey, S'arnt, whose side 'ya on?" Everyone laughed.

A cloud covered the moon. We heard the North Koreans moving toward us. The wheels on a machine gun squeaked as they rolled it forward. A gook officer issued orders, then it seemed to me, he began to curse. I clearly heard their troops grunting when they tried to move something heavy. We got into a shouting match with them. I had picked up some gook curses when I served in China in '46. I called them "turtles," which is supposed to be as insulting to an oriental as calling an American an SOB. I shouted, "Hey, you rickshaw-pulling

³⁹ Burton F. Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 355, 369; Second Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 9; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3, 20; First Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 16; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 192; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 19-20.

turtles, stick your heads out so I can knock them off!" From the darkness down the hill, someone screamed, "Marine, fuck Harry Truman and John Foster Durres!" [Dean Acheson was actually the Secretary of State under Truman, Dulles would come in under Eisenhower, however, Dulles was a "consultant" in Truman's administration.] Vittori laughed. I asked him, "Who in hell is John what's-name?" Up till then I didn't know who Dulles was.

Our FO yelled for us to get down because he was going to bring in a barrage in front of us. CRASH! CRASH! In it came. I felt good knowing we could get the gooks when they were between the lines.

Once it was over I looked over the rim of the hole and saw the flash of an enemy 76-mm gun. The shell hissed toward us. It exploded in the treetops above us and showered us with shrapnel. The fourth round exploded near the FO's hole. A kid nearby yelled, "He's dead! He's dead!"

A spotter plane flew over and called in artillery. The 76-mm stopped firing.

Clouds floated across the sky. Sometimes the moon was out and it was bright; other times the moon was covered by clouds, and it was pitch black.⁴⁰

Possibly, the Marines could even smell the enemy. "We . . . listened to Sergeant Sam's advice. He told us that he knew when the enemy was coming at night because he could smell them. I had my doubts until several months later when I smelled a faint, musty odor like wet blankets that had been lying out a week or longer. This happened just before an attack and I knew then what he had tried to tell us. The clothes the enemy wore had a strong odor."⁴¹

Multiple waves of attackers (five waves) fell or were repulsed by the 2/1 defenders (an estimated 1,200 NKPAs were either killed or wounded in the assault). An example of the valor demonstrated by the Marines is the fact that two 2/1 Marines each committed acts for which they were awarded the Medal of Honor within forty-eight hours of each other (the Medals of Honor earned on Hills 673, 749, and 680 in three days equaled the number for Tarawa in World War II). The action of PFC Edward Gomez

⁴⁰ Oral account of PFC Lyle Conanway, Fox Company, 2/1, in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 302-303.

⁴¹ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

from Easy 2/1, September 14, has already been detailed. The second act was by Corporal Joseph Vittori from Fox 2/1.⁴²

When a forward platoon was hard hit and forced to withdraw, Corporal Vittori ran past the withdrawing troops with two volunteers at his heels to assault the enemy. His posthumous Medal of Honor citation continued:

Overwhelming them in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle, he enabled his company to consolidate its positions to meet further imminent onslaughts. Quick to respond to an urgent call for a rifleman to defend an heavy machine gun positioned on the extreme point of the northern flank and virtually isolated from the remainder of the unit when the enemy again struck in force during the middle of the night, he assumed position under the devastating barrage and, fighting a single-handed battle, leaped from one flank to the other, covering each foxhole in turn as casualties continued to mount, manning a machine gun when the gunner was struck down and making repeated trips through the heaviest shellfire to replenish ammunition.⁴³

Reinforcements, too, were pinned down by enemy fire, and many Marine positions contained only the dead and wounded for a hundred yards around. Vittori, nevertheless, fought on. NKPAs made it within feet of him, but fell dead. He and another Marine (Lyle Conaway) simulated greater strength in their area by firing rapidly from different positions.⁴⁴

Vittori was only 22 years old and from Beverly, Massachusetts. He almost single-handedly met one of the fiercest mass charges of the Korean war, and was credited with killing at least 40 enemy himself. He held off the enemy for more than three hours with his BAR and expended more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition. He used his own body to draw fire in keeping the infiltrating NKPA soldiers from taking out the Marine MG positions. He also ranged forward from his fox hole in a wide circle. Twice, enemy leapt

⁴² 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3, 19-20; Jack L. Cannon, "Attack on Hills 673 and 749," 24; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 193.

⁴³ Medal of Honor Award Citation for Joseph Vittori.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

from the bushes and wounded him with a burp gun and rifle fire in the side, but he cut them down with his BAR.⁴⁵

Either of his wounds was ambulatory, but Vittori refused to stop. He had been wounded once before from shrapnel in June near Yangu. He had been given opportunity then to take a job in his unit that would keep him out of harm's way, but he wanted to be with his buddies. His platoon leader, 2nd Lt Harry Randall of Wisconsin, had wanted to make him a squad leader, but he had refused, instead wishing to remain simply a BAR man. He did not want to tell his buddies what to do.⁴⁶

One of the MGs ran out of ammo. Vittori moved against the NKPA, firing his BAR from the hip to cut down the enemy in their dirty cotton uniforms. He moved to the downed MG and held from there while it was resupplied. He saved the machine gun crew by cutting down four or five NKPA within arms reach of the position. One had a burp gun and was right on top of the Marines, but Vittori "came from nowhere to cut him down," said Corporal Johnny Gifford of Eden, Texas. Another Marine MG jammed, its barrel glowing red hot. Vittori moved and took over defending that position as well with his BAR. He leapt from position to position spraying bullets from his 20lb. BAR. In this way he posted himself at three different foxholes, each five yards apart, and defended them all.⁴⁷

"Mortally wounded by enemy machine gun and rifle bullets while persisting in his magnificent defense of the sector where approximately 200 enemy dead were found the following morning, Corporal Vittori, by his fortitude, stouthearted courage and great

⁴⁵ Undated Public Information Document by Sgt. Frank L. Creasy, Marine Combat Correspondent, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, "Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952."

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

personal valor, had kept the point position intact despite the tremendous odds and undoubtedly prevented the entire battalion position from collapsing.” Vittori’s platoon was part of the two Marine companies credited with crushing the NKPA regiment that had assaulted the hill. One Marine officer, 1st Lt Edward B. Boyd of Nebraska, whose platoon was first hit in the assault estimated that “If it’s possible to figure such things in percentages, Corporal Vittori was at least 25 percent of the battalion’s strength.”⁴⁸

Three 2/1 Marines earned the Navy Cross in the same action. The first was PFC Richard N. Blasongame, acting platoon sergeant for Weapons Company’s HMG platoon. His HMGs were emplaced along a ridgeline on the point of his battalion’s perimeter, “exposed to attack from all three sides and in close proximity to fortified enemy positions.” When the massive counterattack came, his gun section was in the hornet’s nest of the assault. In the heated chaos of exploding shells, screaming men, and white hot-steel, Blasongame remained calm and maintained perfect fire control. He manned a gun when one of his gunners was hit, hurled grenades, and gave first aid to the fallen. He also made sure the wounded were evacuated, and continually rallied his men to repulse every attack.⁴⁹

Soon, ammo and grenades were short. Blasongame leapt from his foxhole and made his way under heavy fire to tell the CO of the company. He then helped with the resupply. Once, he found out the troops to either side of his section were all casualties, but he nevertheless refused to withdraw and held his area, “later going to adjacent positions, bringing up reinforcements, and placing them in positions on his flanks. When a grenade exploded under his last remaining gun,” Blasongame received shrapnel in his

⁴⁸ Medal of Honor Award Citation for Joseph Vittori; Undated Public Information Document by Sgt. Frank L. Creasy.

⁴⁹ Navy Cross Award Citation for Richard N. Blasongame.

face and hands. The blast had also damaged the transverse mechanism on the MG. Blasongame continued firing anyway by manually moving the tripod itself from side to side. When 0400 came, only four survivors remained of his sixteen man section. Three of the casualties had been KIA. In front of his position were 287 dead NKPA. Blasongame was one reason his unit was able to hold.⁵⁰

The second 2/1 Marine to earn a Navy Cross that night was PFC Lyle F. Conaway, a Rifleman of Fox Company, 2/1. When the attack came, he volunteered with Joseph Vittori to defend the HMG on the extreme point of the northern flank. This required him to be in a relatively exposed position when the heavy barrage came down, but he braved the rain of exploding steel, and stayed where he could defend the HMG. He punched out round after round into advancing enemy from his M-1 rifle, and when the “ping” of an empty clip spent itself inaudibly in the crash of battle, he pressed in another 8 round clip from his bandolier and resumed fire. Later, the HMG was knocked out by fire, and he rushed from position to position, firing as fast as he could to make the enemy think more men were in his area. This enabled other Marines to get the HMG back into action. Conaway was seriously wounded in his actions, but refused evacuation, continuing to fire on the enemy until he became too weak from blood loss. “By his indomitable spirit and great personal valor in the face of tremendous odds, he contributed immeasurably to the repulse of the hostile force.”⁵¹

Conaway remembered the actions of himself and Joe Vittori that night:

I no longer have an accurate sense of when certain events on that night took place. I know Joe and I decided each of us should try to catch some sleep. I took the first watch, but after only ten minutes Vittori sat up and told me to try to get some rest. Damn, I fell asleep. Next thing I knew, Joe was shaking me and

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Navy Cross Award Citation for Lyle F. Conaway.

saying, "Here they come! Here they come! Look at 'em. Look at all of 'em!" I couldn't see shit, I just couldn't wake up. My eyes wouldn't open. Then it broke loose. Everyone began firing at once. The area was engulfed in flames. All I could see were flashes. I fired at muzzle blasts. Two or three Chinese crawled toward our position. I fired at them. One of them raised up and threw a grenade; I couldn't see it, but I recognized the gesture. It exploded on the lip of the hole, and the concussion blast caught me in the face. I raised up instinctively and caught a couple of slugs in the shoulder. I fell back heavily and was now really disoriented. Blood from wounds on my scalp and forehead flowed over my eyes, nose, and mouth. The noise was tremendous. You had to shout to be heard. Joe looked at me, then yelled, "Corpsman!" I knew where I was, but not how badly I'd been hit. I knew I wasn't blind. I moved my right arm, but it was stiff and numb. I barely heard Joe's yell, so I knew no one else could. I really didn't expect any help to get through that hell. Joe leaned down and shouted that I should try to get over the ridge. When I looked in that direction I saw enemy fire sweeping it like a broom. I concentrated my entire effort now on getting back into the fight. I located my rifle by the edge of the hole. When I tried to fire, I found it had jammed. Joe kept yelling, "Look at them! Look! They're all over! Help, throw grenades!" I pulled the pins with my right hand and threw with my left. I managed to throw them far enough so we weren't splattered by our own shrapnel.

I heard the splat that a bullet makes when it hits flesh. Vittori sort of slumped. I was really frightened, because his fire had been so effective and kept the gooks off us. He straightened up in a kneeling position and rubbed his chest. I could see it was wet. He said, "Load my empty magazines. Don't load 'em backwards like Pete did." The two machine guns on our left fired steady streams of bullets. Joe got his BAR back into the fight. The scene looked as if it were lit by a barn fire. I saw men running and firing. I alternately loaded magazines and threw grenades. The machine gun farthest away took a grenade, and the gun tumbled on its side. Its red-hot barrel ignited some leaves and grass. Then the gun pit next to us took a couple of grenades. Both guys fell over. One of the guys, Blankenship—I recognized him because he was very stout—got up and began firing the gun again. He leaned over, his face nearly touching the red-hot barrel. He was hit again and fell on the barrel. His hair caught fire.⁵²

Conaway was no stranger to combat. He knew well the typical tactics of the NKPA and what a night-time defensive battle usually amounted to. But this fight was different. It was among the most fierce the Marines had seen in all of the war:

Normally, the enemy ran out of ammo after twenty minutes, and the fighting would stop until they were resupplied. Not so, this night. The longer it went, the worse it got. I had a tough time breathing—just too much smoke; the smell of cordite made me cough. The gooks tried to organize themselves, but fortunately they could not hear each other. The noise was deafening.

⁵² Oral account of PFC Lyle Conaway, Fox Company, 2/1, in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 304-305.

Joe began firing over my head; I ducked as low as I could. The muzzle of the BAR was only inches from my ears, and the muzzle blasts felt like my eardrums were being pierced. About then, I was overjoyed to find my Thompson at the bottom of the hole; I'd clear forgotten about it. Joe shouted, "I'm gonna go get the machine gun." He crawled over Blankenship's gun. I began firing the Thompson. Joe pulled the body off the gun, but when he yanked the gun toward him it fell into the hole. I'm not sure, but I think about then, Vittori got hit again. He doubled up. I knew if he went down, we'd be overrun. It would then be just a matter of time. I saw to my right everything had been knocked out, even the heavy machine gun. I think the guy's in the FO's hole held out for a while, but then they, too, were silenced.⁵³

The deluge of enemy fire lasted for what seemed an eternity, but Conaway was eventually able to make it to the top of the ridge. He and other Marines who had fought there would receive reinforcement, but for too many, the fight had been their last:

Suddenly, everything grew quiet. No more noise. A few whistles, but no more firing. It was totally unreal. Joe said, "We can't hold 'em—have to get back. I'll cover you, go ahead. I'll cover you." I could hear many sounds now; the gooks were giving commands and trying to pick up their wounded. I heard moans.

A group of about eight gooks came out of somewhere and walked up the hill. I believe they thought we were all dead. I hoped Joe would begin firing soon. If he waited too long he'd be in my line of fire. Joe opened up. Then I did. My shoulder hurt and was still numb. We really splattered them. Another group behind the first opened fire on us, then faded into the night. Joe got into a kneeling position. He said again, "Gotta get back to the ridgeline. You go, I'll cover for you." A rifle cracked. Splat. Joe's head snapped back. He grabbed his face and fell over. When I got to him, I saw steam coming from the blood running down his face. I fired one more clip, then scrambled up the hill toward the ridgeline. Looking back once, I saw my canteen glinting in the moonlight. I did not know then how much I was going to miss that water; if I had, I might have gone back for it.

I stumbled over the top of the ridge and fell into a foxhole. When I looked up I was facing the business end of a .45. My face was so swollen and bloody, they didn't know who I was.

Reinforcements arrived. I showed them where our positions were. This done, I started walking south.⁵⁴

The third Marine to receive a Navy Cross for his actions the day before and in the fight that night was Lt Col Franklin B. Nihart, the CO of 2/1. On September 15, when the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 302-306.

advance on Hill 749 stalled under the heavy enemy fire, Nihart “boldly made his way through the volume of hostile fire to the exposed positions of the leading elements and personally coordinated all the available supporting arms and aircraft in successfully furthering the attack.” He was ever in the thick of the battle that night, as well. He “skillfully maneuvered his units to meet the continued thrusts by waves of opposing troops and, although exposed to hostile fire from a distance less than 200 meters, maintained an effective defense perimeter despite severe casualties within his battalion.” Nihart was instrumental in his Battalion’s ability to hold.⁵⁵

A Navy Corpsman for 2/1 was Anthony Daniel La Monica from Chicago. “Tony” as he was called, was very dear to the Marines around him, not just because of his medical role, but because of the selfless courage with which he carried it out. He was known for ignoring enemy fire to go to the aid of the fallen, working to patch wounds while bullets struck all around him. Once, he had even had his belt shot off. Midway up Hill 749 the day before, Tony dashed again through enemy fire to assist a wounded Marine. Dust burst up around as bullets mixed with green tracers struck the dirt, but he succeeded in moving the wounded Marine to cover.⁵⁶

Now in the dense rain of red hot steel and high explosives preceding the heavy enemy attack, Tony was again at work. He left the protection of his foxhole and openly aided the wounded, but received a wound of his own during the first of the five enemy attacks. He didn’t let on about this to the Marines, however, and continued to aid the many wounded. In the second attack, he incurred other wounds from bullets and

⁵⁵ Navy Cross Award Citation for Franklin B. Nihart.

⁵⁶ Undated Public Information Document by Corporal Louis Jobst, Marine Combat Correspondent, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, “Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952.”

shrapnel. He began to lose blood in dangerous amounts but helped carry stretcher-borne Marines to the rear and returned with ammunition. He refused evacuation. Too many needed help for him to leave.

Another enemy assault crashed against 2/1's lines, and Tony got word that NKPA troops had infiltrated the Marine lines. Tony armed himself with a fallen Marine's rifle and fended off enemy soldiers who tried to attack the wounded under his care. When morning came, Tony was found, dead of his wounds, but he had given his life in the aid of the wounded, exemplifying the highest naval traditions of the Navy Corpsmen.⁵⁷

One Marine combat correspondent, Corporal Louis Jobst, in a never before published account, described the general experience of combat in the dark that chill September morning:

It's suddenly night. You're so tired that every muscle cries out for rest. You aren't even thinking any longer. You left a lot behind when you started up this slope behind our "walking" mortar barrage.

It seems only a moment ago that you were crouching behind a little rise near the crest of the hill, trying to catch your breath and wait for "the word."

Four times the company assaulted this hill. Did it really take only four assaults to capture it? Hill 749 is secured. No use looking back.

Down the line the word is passed: "Dig in against a possible counterattack." Entrenching tools cut into the hillside. You wonder: "What would the gooks want this place for? Haven't they had enough yet?" But you dig your hole fast and deep.

The outfit is five hours by trail from the supply point. The lieutenant asks: "What do you want—water, ammo or chow?" Everyone agrees: "Ammo up!"

Now the darkness deepens. Small talk ebbs and stops. Shells click into their chambers and in the ominous quiet you can hear the safety locks click off.

No one says the enemy is creeping closer. No need to. Everyone knows that they are.

It is one a.m. when flares light up the horizon. A systematic attack is on. First come the feelers. They inch up the slope through the shadows. Now, they are here. Spasmodic rifle shots rip into your lines. They seem to say: "Commit yourselves, Marines. We're here and in larger numbers than you."

But no flashing Marine rifle gives away his position.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Then comes the charge. Up the slope comes a wave of enemy. Gunners sit behind their sights. In a foxhole one Marine aims his rifle and another pulls the pin out of a grenade. Flares fly up, a bugle sounds and you can see the shrieking enemy.

The hill is covered with the enemy like ants. Machine guns, BARs and grenades join in the chorus of resistance.

What follows are individual dramas, all different.

To one it is the wisp of machine gun fire across the front of his hole. To another it is the crash of enemy mortars.

To some it is the buddy who roams behind your foxhole, standing up in the semi-darkness shouting encouragement and firing his Browning into the enemy tide surging toward you.

To others it is kneeling in a pile of cartridges and firing flares.

But on Hill 749 it is a team of Marines that throw back the enemy. Not once or twice, but five times. It is a team so schooled in discipline and accuracy that it can repel all attackers.

Individual dreams blend into an impersonal picture: the defense of the hill. In the blazing moment it was stand or die. You were trained to stand and stand you did. This story is so big that it can only be remembered.

With the first gray light of dawn, you can survey the night's results. It is easy to sweep the slope and valley with your eyes and see that this hill was taken and held for good purpose.

Strewn down the grade and across the valley are the enemy dead who will never fight against you, your company, or your country again.

And on the other side of the hill is another ridge.⁵⁸

The result of the repulse by the 1st Marines of the five successive waves of enemy resulted in the decimation of the 91st Regiment NKPA. The enemy attack was well coordinated across the entire division front. No less than 150 NKPA assaulted 3/1 (west of 2/1) near Hill 751, simultaneous to the attacks against 2/1. This attack was beaten back, and the enemy could only muster lesser forces throughout the morning in three more attacks on 3/1.⁵⁹

George and Item, again, faced the brunt of the onslaught for 3/1. Most of the storm, however, was against Item Company. One Hundred-fifty enemy attacked down the ridgeline running northwest from item's positions to Hill 1052, and were only broken

⁵⁸ Corporal Louis Jobst, Public Information Document, National Archives, dated 2 November 1951.

⁵⁹ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 16; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 193; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 19-20.

after an hour and a half of combat. However, the enemy did not rush in blind. The NKPA soldiers sneaked down the ridgeline, prepared entrenchments close to Marine lines, then attacked. Light probes persisted the rest of the night but the main action was over for 3/1. Morning found 59 shattered North Korean corpses around Item's firing lanes, with another 75 KIA and 50 WIA estimated. In addition, Item took 10 prisoners.

Casualties for 3/1 were 2 KIA and 14 WIA. The elements attacking Item had been the 3rd Regiment, 45th NK Division. This division was newly arrived in the area on the 15th.⁶⁰

The KMCs and 5th Marines were slated to relieve 3/1 in its positions this day. At 0600, a company of KMCs began relief of George Company. How and Item were replaced by 3/5 and 2/5: 3/5 relieved Item and 2/5 How by 1200. Thereafter, How Company moved to Hill 673 to attach to 2/1 as part of its defenses while the rest of the battalion headed for regimental reserve in place of 1/1.⁶¹ (For unit boundaries, see Map # 28.)

In summary, at 0120, 3/1 was attacked. The enemy assault was thrown back with heavy NKPA losses. The KMCs and 5th Marines relieved 3/1 at 1000 that morning, whereupon it moved to regimental reserve. It could only be committed again to the fight on division orders.⁶²

The Marines of 1/1 had not gone immediately into the combat line as did 2/1 and 3/1. They were the regimental reserve at first. Now it was their turn to attack. PFC Davidson of 1/1 recalled:

We set up temporary positions just short of Hill 749, a part of the Punchbowl battle line. There were tanks—ours—firing over our heads at the North Korean positions on the ridgeline.

⁶⁰ Third Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁶² 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 18.

Marines were always digging in and expecting to stay a few days, only to have the gunny come along, usually within hours, with the order "Move out!" This is what happened to us a day after we went into reserve below Hill 749.

We started moving up through an open valley. Gunny Hamilton got us lined up and ordered us to keep a five yard interval "because we will be under direct enemy observation." That made us pay attention, no mistake.

We reached the center of the valley before the North Koreans saw us moving up, carrying our mortars and ammunition. They immediately started shelling us with 76-mm artillery. One of our platoon gunners [Weapons Company] caught a ground burst a few dozen yards ahead of me. He just seemed to come apart. It was a terrible thing to see.

There were a couple of Inch'on veterans in our outfit, men who were about ready to go home. They were more nervous than the new men because they knew what it was like, and the last thing they wanted to do was go into another action only days before they were due to get on the boat for Japan and the States.

The shells were raining down in earnest as we slogged across that open valley, and Gunny Hamilton, acting like a Marine in a John Wayne movie, just strolled along the line urging us, "Get a move on, Marine, you're falling back." He was a veteran of Tarawa and a typical Marine regular.⁶³

With daylight, despite the heavy casualties the division had taken, Marines of 1/1 (relatively fresh because they had been in reserve while 3/1 and 2/1 were under the brunt of the enemy attacks) saddled up and stepped out at 0930 to pass through 2/1 and resume the assault. Mortar fire continued to hit the Marines as 1/1 entered 2/1 lines, slowing the passage of lines, but by 1050, 1/1 continued to advance along the ridge to 749. (The passage of lines ended at 1030.) At 1055, an airstrike and artillery barrage prepped the objective. Two strong points in the enemy line dominated the positions of the Marines' attacking companies, two high knobs of ground (Battalion Objectives 1 and 2) on the ridge running to 812 from 749. (See Map # 29) Artillery, mortars, 75mm RGs, and AT rockets were called to suppress these points while the

⁶³ Oral account of PFC Frank J. Davidson, in: Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 386.

companies moved forward. (The 2nd Battalion 1st Marines supported 1/1's advance with fire.)⁶⁴

"The enemy situation was well known to the 1st Battalion. They now faced an unyielding enemy, well supplied with grenades and ammunition for his mortars, A/W and S/A." The 1st Battalion utilized all available supporting arms, but the advance was nevertheless slow after the 1107 jump off. (The enemy in the area numbered at least 300.) "The fighting was intense. Enemy mortar and artillery fire was heavy and accurate." Able Company reached its assigned portion of 749 at 1500 and dug in while Baker Company passed through. Eventually, resistance began to slacken as the attack progressed. The battalion had its portion of Objective BAKER in hand by 1830. (Charlie Company would make a patrol the next day that secured Objective 1. The rest of the company attacked and seized Objective 2.) Finally, at 1800 that evening, these Marines were in place (on part of the northern ridgeline running from 749 to Hill 812) and began to dig in. (See Map# 27)⁶⁵

At the close of business on September 16, Hill 751 was in the control of 3/1, and 2/1 and 1/1 were deployed in a line of fox holes almost a mile long (1,500 yards) on both sides of 749. How Company 3/1 was attached to 2/1 for the night as that battalion set up a blocking position. (See Map # 27)⁶⁶

"Hill 749 had finally been secured. A number of mutually supporting hidden enemy bunkers had been knocked out in a ruthless battle of extermination [the battle was not

⁶⁴ First Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2; First Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 20.

⁶⁵ First Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 17-18; First Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 2; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 193; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary," September 1951, 19-20.

⁶⁶ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 18.

that “ruthless” for the Marines; they took many POWs], and veterans of the World War II Pacific conflict were reminded of occasions when Japanese resistance flared up in similar fashion after ground was thought to be secure.”⁶⁷

Even after it was “secure,” 749 was a dangerous place. PFC Floyd Baxter continued:

The enemy covered their foxholes with grass and leaves and whatever. Once we had run past their holes, they’d pop up and hit us from the rear. That is why we lost so many men. Even after we secured our objective and our mortars were set up behind Charlie Company, we still found gooks hidden in small holes. Many of them elected to fight, and they died in their holes.

After everything had quieted down, we sat around our eighty-one [mortar]. Suddenly, we were sprayed by a burp gun. Fortunately, only one man was hit. The gook doing the firing had lain in his hole for a day. He came screaming up the hill at us. A shot from the M-1 of one of the ammo carriers stopped him; his head seemed to explode. Needless to say, we sent a couple of patrols then to find and destroy any remaining gooks.⁶⁸

PFC Frank J. Davidson, too, remembered Hill 749:

I don’t think I’ll ever forget Hill 749. We mortar ammo carriers were used to filling in holes in the rifle company lines when we weren’t humping mortar rounds to the guns. It was almost better than carrying ammunition up the slopes of Hill 749, which seemed almost vertical.

The enemy really didn’t want to give up the Punchbowl. The hills around it were valuable—the highest ground in that part of Korea. So there were counterattacks on our line almost every night. And when there were no counterattacks, we were shelled by their biggest mortars.

One night I watched from my gunpit as my friend, Mickey Healy, ran from one hole to another while the rounds were falling. There was an enormous bright flash and I saw Healy flying through the air, his arms and legs flailing away at nothing. I thought surely he was dead. But he fell near my own hole and promptly crawled in with me. He hadn’t received a scratch. A miracle.

Our casualties were heavy, but we held on to our hill, and to the punchbowl as well. . . .⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 193-194; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 19-20.

⁶⁸ Oral account of PFC Floyd Baxter, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 299.

⁶⁹ Oral account of PFC Frank J. Davidson, in Knox, *Uncertain Victory*, 387.

CHAPTER 9

THE ASSAULT ON DOG

September 16 was not over yet for the 5th Marines. Said the 5th Marines Historical diary:

The master plan of the operation as set forth in Division Operations Order 24-51 and Regimental Operations Order 42-51, began to unfold themselves in the form of concrete action. For many members of the Regiment who joined us on the 10th, 11th, and 12th Replacement Drafts, it meant their first “sip” of the bitter realities of combat. For the “salts” it meant the termination of the “luxuries” and “securities” of being in reserve, and once again meeting face to face with the grimness of war. To all, it would mean a cleared more evident substantiation of the fact that Korea can be pretty rough “Police Action.”¹

H-hour was set for 0830. The enemy was elements of the 14th Regiment, 1st Division, III NK Corps and the 45th Regiment, 15th Division, and 3rd Regiment, 1st Division. The above mentioned Operations Orders basically set forth the following plan: while the 1st Marines continued attacking 749, the 5th Marines would send 2/5 to take Objective Dog (Hill 812), and 3/5 to take Regimental Objectives 1 and 2: 1 being the higher knob on the finger ridge 3/5 had replace Item 3/1 upon, and 2 being Hill 980. After 3/5 had Objective 1 in hand, it was to support 2/5's attack by fire and prepare to seize Hill 980 on order. Marines of 1/5 were regimental reserve.² (See Map #30)

The Third Battalion, 5th Marines assaulted with How Company 3/5 in the lead. It relieved Item 3/1 at 0910 and took over that unit's zone of action. It then stepped out in the attack at 1210 towards Regimental Objective 1, an unnamed hill about 1,000 yards southeast of 1052, 1,500 yards southwest of 812, and 1,200 yards north and slightly

¹ Fifth Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 18.

² *Ibid.*, 18, OpnO 42-51.

east of 751. (See Map # 30) It was along the same finger ridge leading to 1052 item 3/1 had previously occupied. How had only advanced 150 yards up this finger ridge when machine gun and rifle bullets from both flanks sprayed into the company, the air dense with snapping steel, the most deadly type of swarm. The Marines had to pull back to the LD after two hours of this hail and there brought in artillery to try and squelch the sources of the fire. Then, at 1800, an air strike came in and dropped napalm and launched rockets into Hill 980, eliminating much of the enemy fire, or at least silencing it for a time. That hill was reported to be rife with "heavily entrenched positions" brimming with enemy troops.³

Item Company 3/5 was in direct support of How Company. George, however, was in battalion reserve.

"Little progress was made by the attacking elements of the regiment, as far as ground gained was concerned. The day was of extreme value in as much as we now had the opportunity to 'feel out' the enemy; to get an idea of where and how he was entrenched; the type of tactics to employ to 'dig him out;' and in general, get a more complete picture of the 'what and how' of the job that was ahead. It was amply apparent that the job ahead would be 'rough.' We were now engaged with an enemy that had had plenty of time to 'dig in.'" Casualties for 3/5 16th September were 3 KIA and 7WIA.⁴

The day was similar for 2/5. They passed through 3/1 near Hill 751 that morning to attack Hill 812 (Objective Dog), 1,000 yards to their north. (And 3/1, then subsequently relieved on Hill 751 by elements of the KMC regiment, retired to regimental reserve, except for How Company, which set up a company perimeter on Hill 673.) Again the hill

³ Fifth Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 19; Third Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7.

⁴ Fifth Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 19, Appendix V, Dispatch 162158.

to be seized was atop a “T” shaped ridge, and there were no routes of approach available that were not within mutually supporting fields of fire from the enemy. Many enemy defenses were on reverse slopes (making them very difficult to eliminate with artillery, tanks, and mortars). The primary attack was to be made by 2/5 on the right. To the left of 2/5, 3/5 would advance at the same time and support the attack on 812, but were to be ready to attack Hill 980 when ordered. While all this was going on, 1/5 was to remain in regimental reserve. It moved to an assembly area on Hill 702, Yoke Ridge.⁵

Fox 2/5 was the leading company. Easy Company was battalion reserve, and Dog company set up to support the attack by fire from the former positions of How Company 3/1, which they had relieved near Hill 751. Fox moved out between Hills 673 and 680 along the low ground formed by a tributary of the Soyang River. The relief of units from the 1st Marines rendered a delay, however, and the attack was not really moving before mid afternoon (this delay would prove costly). Weapons Company set up with Dog Company, its heavy machine guns organized for battery fire over the heads of the attacking troops along with support from the 75mm recoilless rifles. In the vicinity of Dog Company, several mines cause multiple casualties among members of the 5th Marines. Trails in the area were jammed to capacity with the 1st Marine troops being relieved and the 5th Marine troops relieving them—it was too unsafe to leave the trails because of the heavy amount of mines in the area. The necessary lack of dispersion and interval caused a fear of enemy mortar and artillery fire, so elements of the 5th Marines set up in positions to provide cover over the trails to prevent observed enemy interdiction fire.⁶

⁵ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 194; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 19-20.

⁶“Historical Diary,” of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 2, 26, 27; Major Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 40 (August 1956): 13.

Soon, the Marines of 3/1, recently relieved and filing out on the trails, witnessed the disturbing image of seeing many of the men who had just relieved them exiting the area in ambulances and on stretchers.⁷

Fox Company finally moved out at 1200, and because elements of the 1st Marines were still engaged with enemy on Hill 749, the going was slow—contact was imminent and there were many mines. Stiff resistance met the Marines in the usual form of scathing enemy machine gun, artillery, and mortar fire (from positions on the approaches to 812), which halted the attack by 1700. The Marines needed to regroup, consolidate, and provide for the evacuation of their casualties.⁸

Gerald P. Averill was there that day:

“F” Company, with the mission of making the main effort against Hill 812, had been expected to move out as soon as “D” Company was in position [prior to 1200]. Instead, it was nearly an hour late in leaving the assembly area, and another hour before the assault platoons started up the winding trail into the valley [deep and heavily forested, this valley was about 1,200 yards wide at this point] between “D” Company [on a ridge between 749 and 673] and Hill 812. All this backing and filling, all this aimless milling around had been duly noted by the North Korean outposts, who quickly passed the information back to the units on the enemy’s main battle position. The little brown men of the North Korean People’s Army took up the slack—waiting for the lead elements of “F” Company to appear in their fire lanes.

At 1700, “F” Company stepped into it right up to the neck. Two platoon leaders were hit, and the toll of dead and wounded mounted as daylight dwindled. Two hours later, one platoon had forced its way forward and upward until it had gained the high ground 400 meters south and east of the enemy strong point on Hill 812. There was no reason to turn back. It was better to stay put, even though it was out of contact with the parent unit.⁹

Fox Company’s attack and the rest of the initial seizure of Hill 812 has never been thoroughly narrated. The above paragraph is about the extent of detail given it in any

⁷ “Historical Diary,” of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 28.

⁸ “Historical Diary,” of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 27; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 194; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 19-20; Maj Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” 13.

⁹ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 265.

published account. This is surprising because the Historical Diary of 2/5 is rife with details. Usually, the historical diaries are dull and summarizing with very little detail beyond the location of units and times of advance and other lifeless facts. But this heretofore unexploited source begs consideration in this account because it actually goes down to the platoon level whereas most of the battalion diaries barely go to the company level. The story of this battle is incomplete without it.

Fox Company reached a fork in the trail at 1430 on September 16th, not yet having met any major enemy resistance. Here, the platoons separated. The 2nd Platoon headed west towards Hill 812. The 3rd Platoon moved up the ridge parallel to the boundary between the 1st and 5th Marines zones of action. The 1st platoon accompanied the company CP to a draw a little further along. The preparatory fires for the attack were reported to have good coverage on the objective (meaning they seemed to saturate the target area and not go beyond it too much), but these had to be limited as the exact location of friendly frontline units was not certain. The general plan was “to move along the trail and valley east of Hill 812 to seek the finger ridges and attack up to Objective Dog.”¹⁰ (See Map # 31)

The ridgeline running north between Hill 749 and Hill 812 in the zone of the 1st Marines was not yet secure, but Marines were sighted by Dog Company in that area. This led the CO of 2/5 to speculate that the 1st Marines now had this area of 749 in hand. If this was the case, he could get permission to use the 1st Marines’s zone to advance along the ridgeline toward 812 instead of having to get up to it through the valley—the attack, instead of going from low ground against high ground, could begin

¹⁰ “Historical Diary,” of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 29.

on the high ground. However, the Marines sighted were elements of Fox Company, and the area in question was *not* yet in Marine hands.¹¹

Finally, at 1555, word came in as to the locations of Fox Company's platoons. Because word had not been received did not mean that Fox Company had been negligent in reporting in, often the radios and landlines were unreliable--the radios for various reasons and the wire because anything from enemy fire to a passing vehicle to a Korean laborer acquiring wire to tie his burden could sever it. The best possible approach available to the advancing Marines was the southwest finger ridge, which the 2nd Platoon had ascended. It was heavily wooded to provide concealment and at least part of the route was in defilade from enemy MG fire on the objective. This platoon, under 2nd LT Roth (no first name given) soon saw that the tree cover had been cleared from the summit of Hill 812 and in a radius of 65 yards from the top. This area was devoid of any vegetation, a prepared enemy kill zone. The ridge leading to 812, furthermore, was a razorback ridge.¹²

The enemy emplacements along the ridge are illustrated in Map # 32. "The forward slope . . . was defended by a series of mutually-supporting, well dug-in, prepared fortifications, mostly bunkers with embrasures for automatic weapons. These were positioned in a rough semi-circle . . . and were interspersed with numerous rifle pits and foxholes of the small, compact, enemy-type. These gave the enemy coverage of approximately 180 degrees in an arc . . . and effectively delivered fire on nearly all routes of approach." The enemy defenses showed that they expected the Marine attack

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

to come down the high ground east to west (ridge-running). Their expectation was correct.¹³

Possibly they had formed their defense as an adaptation to the Marine ridge-running tactics. Unlike the American troops, the Chinese and North Korean soldiers did not “rotate” their men home, so many veterans of the entire war (so far) were among their ranks—even former ROKs who had been captured and forced to fight for the NKPA—and even some who had fought the Japanese in WWII and against the Nationalists in the Chinese civil war. It was not uncommon for Communist soldiers to have as many as fifteen years of combat experience. Therefore, they knew lots of little tricks and had much experience to draw on in formulating a murderous defense.

Enemy emplacements were on either side of the spine of the ridge and could subject an attacker to forward and enfilade fire. The attacking troops would be forced by the narrowness of the razor-back ridge to attack in a column or otherwise very narrow-fronted formation, and the enemy was emplaced to subject such an attack to a withering crossfire. “Bunkers had been placed in saddles, just down from the crest, so that they could not be seen from the direct front until the attackers were quite close. . . . These bunkers delivered fire along a longitudinal axis down the spine in some instances, as the knob which concealed a bunker was not wide enough to prevent fire from approximately thirty degrees from the direct front.”¹⁴

Fox company observed an artillery concentration fired on Hill 812 at 1600 as “reasonably close.” Therefore its position was closer to the objective than the command had suspected. The 2nd Platoon came under fire first as it advanced up the finger of the

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

ridge. Immediately, one man was downed from a long range shot by an enemy sniper. The rest of the fire received, however, was sporadic and inaccurate, so the first shot had been “lucky.” The platoon kept advancing, keeping to the cover of the trees wherever possible.¹⁵

The 3rd Platoon, under 2ndLt Charles Conyngham (who had commanded his platoon less than two months and had, in an improbable coincidence, succeeded his brother, John Conyngham in command), moved along the ridge adjacent to the trail taken by the 2nd Platoon, trying to keep in defilade behind the small finger ridge, and by 1730 had made it to within 500 yards of the objective. It was here these Marines suddenly received intense small arms and MG fire from the front. This hot firefight stopped the 3rd Platoon’s advance. A withering crossfire swept the ridge, riddling Marines with heavy slugs before they could get to cover, and plunging the platoon into confusion. Just then the mortar rounds began to drop, spraying daisy-cutter fragments of white-hot steel across the Marine positions, some finding flesh and spattering the Korean hill with American blood.¹⁶

The wounded fell where they were hit, many in dangerously exposed positions with bullets and shell fragments kicking up dirt all around. Among those hit were the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and one squad leader. It was then that Hospitalman Clines (no first name recorded), a Navy corpsman with the 3rd Platoon rushed from cover to aid the casualties. He seemed to ignore the ground-churning, heavy caliber MG slugs that erupted showers of debris, rock, and dirt all around him as he rendered first-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

aid to the fallen and then helped drag or otherwise evacuate them to the relative safety of cover.¹⁷

Another American on the fire-swept hill found courage within himself. Corporal Lonn (no first name supplied) was a squad leader with the 60mm mortar squad attached to the platoon. He deliberately exposed himself to enemy observation to draw their fire and locate the enemy emplacements by their muzzle flashes or dust. He personally directed fire on at least three enemy positions and was instrumental in the destruction of one enemy MG position on the flank.¹⁸

In this engagement, radio contact was lost with the parent company. Then, when a garbled message came in, the Fox Company Commander sent a runner to the platoon. The runner returned with word that the platoon was in confusion from the loss of most of its leaders as casualties. Lt Holmes (no first name or specification of rank as 1st or 2nd Lt supplied) volunteered to take over and reorganize the 3rd Platoon. In addition a helicopter for “med-evac” was requested through the battalion TACP (Tactical Air Control Party).¹⁹

The morale of Fox Company was further damaged by an incident of friendly fire at dusk involving Dog 2/5 on a ridge to the left of Fox 2/5. This company sighted men approaching it, and unsure if these were friendlies or not, called headquarters to ask that the assault companies mark their positions with WP, so Dog Company could thereby avoid firing on fellow Marines. The “Willie Pete” went up from Fox Company, but attack aircraft in the vicinity saw it and assumed it was to mark an enemy position. These planes hit Fox Company 2/5 with napalm and strafing fire, but miraculously not

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

one casualty was incurred from this. Dog Company observers saw Fox Marines waving air panels at the planes, but couldn't help stop the strike because their radio to the TACP was out.²⁰

Even then, the battalion and company CPs could not be sure of Fox's true positions so could not assist with 4.2 inch mortar-fire. The 1st Platoon was sent to assist the 3rd Platoon, still pinned down under scathing enemy fire, interspersed with mortar and artillery as well as small arms and MG fire.²¹

Meanwhile, the 2nd platoon had come into heavy enemy opposition within 225 meters of the crest of Hill 812. Enemy riflemen cut loose a deluge of fire against the platoon, accompanied by the cacophonous chugging of a heavy MG from a bunker emplacement. Two Marines fell in the first few seconds of the firefight. The platoon advance ground to a halt, enemy fire poured in from all along the crest of the ridge. The Marines sought what cover was available and returned the NKPA fire. Just then a second MG stuttered to life, adding its punctuating voice to the world-splitting crash of combat.²²

The 3rd squad of the light MG platoon, attached to Fox Company's 2nd Platoon, had its weapon already set up to engage the first enemy MG. These Marines turned their fire on the new threat. There was a rapid trading of bullets between the Marine and NKPA automatic weapons and the Marine section leader fell slain. In addition, both the gunner and assistant gunner were wounded. Corporal Lowe, a squad leader (no first name supplied) immediately rushed to the out-of-action gun, and moved the gunner,

²⁰ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 194; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 19-20; Maj Gerald P. Averill, "Final Objective," 13; "Historical Diary," of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 32. Also see chapter on Close Air Support.

²¹ "Historical Diary," of the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, September 1951, 32.

²² *Ibid.*

who, shot in the face, had slumped over the MG, as well as the assistant gunner to safety. He then took over the MG. His accurate and effective fire helped his fellow Marines maneuver to better cover and bring more efficient fire on the enemy. Later, Lowe turned the gun over to another Marine and took over leadership of the light MG section. He displaced the section's second light MG forward, and then exposed himself to enemy fire continually amid a hail of mortar fragments and machine gun bullets to designate targets (sometimes this was done by locating an enemy target by its flash and then showing other Marines where it was by firing a single tracer round at it from a carbine), and help the less experienced gunners clear their weapons when they jammed.²³

The 2nd Platoon managed to get enough of its organic weapons into action to achieve fire superiority on the NKPAs to its immediate front. These Marines neutralized one of the two enemy MG bunkers, and were greeted by the heartening sight of enemy soldiers abandoning that emplacement and fleeing to the rear. Their firefight was not over, however, as plenty of other enemy emplacements had the Marines within their field of fire and continued to fill the air with hot steel and lead in the vicinity of the platoon.²⁴

Meanwhile, the 1st Platoon moved to assist the beleaguered 3rd Platoon on the slopes of Hill 812. By 1845, they had entered the fight. The position where the 3rd Platoon Marines were was actually a small finger ridge, and the Marine assault up this ridge had run into a line of well defended enemy entrenchments. From a higher finger ridge between the 3rd Platoon and the crest of the objective, Lieutenant Holmes, with

²³ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the 1st Platoon, could see that the 3rd Platoon's position was untenable. He had his men set up a base of fire to cover the pinned-down Marines so they could pass through his men to safety. The 1st Platoon let go with a steady rate of red tracers stabbing into the horseshoe shaped portion of the ridge above them and relieved much of the pressure from the 3rd Platoon. By 1900, the message reached the 3rd Platoon about the plan to help them withdraw.²⁵

At dusk, Colonel Stiff (he was actually a LtCol, but LtCols are referred to as "Colonel" both as an abbreviation when referring to them in print, and as a courtesy when talking or writing directly to or about them) finally made successful radio contact with Fox's CO. He wanted to know, since the platoons were so near the objective, if they could have it in hand before dark. Captain William E. Melby, the Fox CO realized that the enemy positions were strong and that his units were riddled with casualties (and were badly shaken from the near-miss of the friendly air strike). He sent back that it was not a likely possibility. Therefore, Colonel Stiff gave him permission to withdraw to a defensible night perimeter.²⁶

By 1915, the 3rd Platoon began the move to withdraw through the 1st Platoon. It then moved to the saddle between the 749 hill mass and Hill 812 to set up a perimeter. Darkness caused the enemy fire to lessen enough soon after that the 1st Platoon, too, could withdraw to a defensible night position under covering artillery fires. The Fox Company FO called in the shells. The position for the night was slightly northeast of the 3rd Platoon in the same saddle. As for the 2nd Platoon, it fought until dark, when the platoon leader received word the other two were withdrawing. Lt Roth opted not to

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

withdraw his platoon with the other two since he was but 150 yards from the crest and in an ideal position to renew the attack in the morning. After a simulated withdrawal to confuse the enemy, he set up his unit in a tight perimeter within the tree line with strict fire, light, camouflage, and noise discipline so that the NKPAs did not even realize they were still in the vicinity.²⁷

After Fox Company had moved out the morning of 16 September, Easy Company was put on alert to be ready to attack. No attack order came down. On the evening of the 16th, the Battalion CO received word from the regimental CO that 2/5 was to resume the attack the next day. Though “H Hour” had not yet been determined, it was suspected that it would be at 0400, “since Division seemed to favor that hour.” Sure enough, a couple of hours later “H-hour” came down as 0400. The Battalion CP then relayed this information to Fox Company, directing the attack to resume at 0400. The message came out as “0900,” however, because of a mistake in the Company’s decoder machine. The mistake would not be realized until 0420 when battalion HQ realized Fox was not attacking. The evening of the 16th, Easy Company was ordered to begin a move to the Fox CP at 0400, September 17.²⁸

At 1630, September 16, the regimental Operation Order 42-51 came down, confirming the earlier verbal orders for the next day’s assault. It designated 0830 as H-hour for Easy (the 0400 H-hour was from Division for the battalion, a job given to Fox, not Easy Company). There was also an airstrike planned to hit Hill 812 and Objective Two in the morning before the attack. The battalion S-3, Major Averill, estimated jump off could be had at 0800 for Easy Company (earlier than the actual planned H-hour) and

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 33, 38.

so the air strikes were planned for 0600. Since requested two hours early, perhaps the usually late planes would actually be overhead before 0800 to make the strike in time for the attack.²⁹

That night was far from peaceful for 2/5. Artillery and mortar shells fell all night long. The bombardments would come in intervals, several rounds hitting in quick succession and then a time of quiet. This was hell on a man's nerves. Most of these shells originated from Hills 980, 1052, or behind the MLR in the enemy's rear, but when they struck so close to Marines, the men hunkering in their foxholes started to believe they were friendly rounds falling short. (Part of this impression was from the fact that some friendly 4.2 inch mortar fire had fallen near Marine locations, but the FSCC was told and had had the fire stopped.)³⁰

The 3rd Section of the 6th MG Squad was with Fox Company 2/5 on part of the ridge east of Hill 812. That night a saturating artillery and mortar bombardment hit. Corporal Burton (no first name supplied), the section's gunner, was hit by shrapnel in his gut and left foot. The wounds were severe and the pain was intense. Warm, sticky blood soaked his trousers and hands. Nevertheless, he risked his life to hurl four boxes of MG ammunition that had caught fire down the hill, and then gave first aid to the fallen, refusing care for himself. He waited until the other wounded had been evacuated before beginning the trek to the company aid station himself, but he fainted from blood loss. His example, however, inspired the men of his unit through the rest of the night, which was cool, with clouds drifting over a full moon.³¹

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34, 37.

At 2400, the Battalion CP was informed that for the next day's attack it would have control of an engineer mine team (to locate and disarm mines), and a liaison team for the Marine tanks in the area. The evacuation of wounded was a formidable logistical problem September 16. In addition, "too many Marines were used as stretcher-bearers for wounded that might have reached the forward aid station under their own power; some, not in danger, might have waited for Koreans to carry them to the rear." The implication is that some Marines were leaping to be stretcher bearers for men that didn't need it in order to escape the shelling on the front lines for a time. For one Marine, the situation was the opposite and he was chastised for it. After being badly wounded, "My comrades were unable to get me to the aid station that night. So early the next morning I walked. Not the smartest thing I have ever done. My arrival at the Battalion Aid Station was highlighted by a detailed explanation of my stupidity. It seems that they had dispatched the litter bearers, at first light, to pick us up. Now I had wasted all that valuable time and scarce resources. I explained that if it would make them feel better I would walk back, up the hill, and lay down so we could start over."³²

The roads that existed in rear areas, too, were a problem. Most became a "sea of mud" that had to be bypassed via a "tank pass," but soon, that too was "impassable to jeeps. [Then] a three-quarter-ton ambulance was used until this vehicle could not pass the quagmire; then 6X6 [2 ½ ton] trucks" And even though hot coffee and soup could be had at the CP of the 5th Marines, none of the line companies got any since Korean carrgadores humped in only essential items—mostly ammo. Other problems were in communication. Again, wires were frequently broken and radios unreliable. For

³² Pooky Pentecost, "First Person Story," first-person account of a Marine. Found at www.1-7marineskorea.com/weremember/first_person_story.htm; "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 35. Website last consulted April 2007.

example: "Fox Company's 3rd Platoon's radio worked part time and Fox CP had difficulties keeping in contact. The 2nd Platoon's radio came in loud and clear, but was not in contact with the 3rd, so could not help."³³

At 0100 that night a sudden urgent request came in to the battalion CP from Fox Company. The frantic Marine reported that two men had been killed and eighteen wounded by the intense mortar and artillery bombardment and stretcher bearers were needed. Forty laborers were sent to carry down the wounded, (only ten of the wounded ended up requiring a stretcher evacuation) and twenty-eight of the laborers became unnecessary when Fox Company's 3rd Platoon carried seven stretcher cases down themselves. (The 3rd platoon had had twelve casualties since the afternoon of the 16th. Thus the company had barely the strength of two full platoons on the slopes leading to 812.)

The excess laborers were sent instead to the supply point over a mile away to the rear near the branch of the river that ran west to east between Yoke and Kanmubong Ridges to hump ammunition to the lines. At 0300, they began bringing ammo to Fox Company, especially the beleaguered 3rd Platoon. Forty more Koreans joined them at 0800. To get this many laborers into action, the labor officer had to use "Korean cooks, interpreters, headquarters personnel, and sixteen Korean officers of company grade;" the number of laborers still out on ammo runs from earlier that night was too great to meet the demand with the regular personnel. Showing great patriotism, some of the ill Koreans on the sick list even volunteered to work though their health was poor. "It was

³³ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 35-37.

largely through the efforts of sincere, patriotic laborers that the supply problem became supportable.”³⁴

The positions for the night of 16-17 September for the rest of 2/5 (besides Fox Company, for which the positions have already been noted) were as follows: Dog Company was in a “tight perimeter” on the slopes of the ridge between 751 and 812, and between How and Item Companies of 3/5; Easy Company was in the vicinity of the Battalion CP near the Hays Line.³⁵

The Marines of 3/5 passed through 3/1 west of 2/5 at 0830 that morning. It, too, attacked north against heavy resistance. It made it to the vicinity of a ridgeline before nightfall, where it dug in (night fell just before 2000 in Korea at this time of year).³⁶

That afternoon, 2/5's 81mm mortar platoon moved close enough to support the last part of the attack late in the evening.³⁷

Thus 16 September ended for the 5th Marines. Fox 2/5 pulled back and set up a defensive perimeter. It then began evacuation of wounded. Contact was made with 3/5 on the left and maintained all night. That night brought no enemy counterattacks for a bright moon was up and the terrain was almost as bright as day.³⁸

Gerald P. Averill described digging in that night:

As it had been on countless other nights of combat, the terrain was bathed by the incandescence of a full moon, the hills and ridge lines so well illuminated that every movement could be detected. Before nightfall Ramsdell and I had dug a chevron-type foxhole across the spine of the ridge. In it were the field phone and the radio. The colonel's hole had been dug nearby.³⁹

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37, 62.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

³⁶ 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 20; “Tactical Study of Mandae-ri Area,” July 1951, Enclosure 1.

³⁷ Maj Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” 14.

³⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 195; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 19-20.

³⁹ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 266.

Besides the friendly fire, another bad incident had occurred. Some Marines in the 5th Marines supply dump had stepped on a buried, undetected mine. One lost his foot and others had bad shrapnel wounds.⁴⁰

The 11th Marines and supporting artillery had fired 79 missions and a whopping 7,108 rounds, wreaking an estimated 105 enemy KIA. The 1st Tank Battalion's Charlie Company expended 220 rounds, but was only credited with destroying two bunkers.⁴¹

For September 16, Marine casualties were 24 KIA, 127 WIA, and 1 MIA. The 1st KMC had 1 WIA. The enemy lost 169 counted KIA, 418 estimated KIA (a total of 587), and 540 estimated WIA. The Marines took 25 POWs. The 1st Marines alone suffered 23 KIA and 110 WIA as well as 48 NBCs (Non-battle casualties).⁴²

The previous four days (just in the sector of Hill 749) totaled 90 KIA, 714 WIA, and 1 MIA. Most of these losses were from the 1st Marines. The enemy losses were 771 counted dead, over 1,600 estimated dead, and 81 prisoners.⁴³

"Because of the heavy casualties suffered by Fox, Easy, which had remained in the assembly area throughout the day, was alerted to move forward by 0400 17 September to take positions in rear of Fox and be prepared to make a passage of lines to continue the attack."⁴⁴

Day Seven: September 17

⁴⁰ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 264.

⁴¹ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 18.

⁴² 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 20-21; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 18.

⁴³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 194; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 19-20.

⁴⁴ Maj Gerald P. Averill, "Final Objective," 14.

The Operations Orders for the day were Division OpnO 25-51 and Regimental Frag Order 139-51, which basically reiterated the previous day's objectives and missions and ordered the attack to resume at 0400. As said the 5th Marines Historical Diary, "But for the rifleman in the front lines, upon whose shoulders rests the burden of final success of any operation, the detailed planning and commands set forth in these orders boiled down to the simple terse words; 'continue the attack to seize objectives.'"⁴⁵

For 3/5 the morning began at 0230 when seven NKPA's infiltrated into Weapons Company's area. A fight ensued and the Marines suffered 3 KIAs and 3 WIAs. At daylight, How Company would support 2/5's attack by fire and send out patrols. None of 3/5's units moved from the night's positions. For 3/5, the attack towards the objectives was over. The next few days would consist of patrolling and digging in.⁴⁶

At 0400 the morning of the 17th, Easy Company (Captain William L. Wallace) moved towards Fox Company's CP, following the same trail as Fox the day before, its forward elements reaching it at 0730. There was supposed to be a guide to meet Easy and show them Fox's positions, but he had been "used as a stretcher bearer" and was not around.⁴⁷ (See Map # 32)

Fox, which had confused the attack order as 0900, discovered the mistake at 0420. It immediately began to prepare to resume its attack. At dawn, it was nearly ready. Lt. Holmes, the platoon leader of the 1st Platoon, was wounded at 0600 by a mortar fragment. Captain Victor Sawina, the Company Executive Officer, took it over.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Fifth Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁷ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

The 5th Marines resumed the attack at 0400 with 2/5 in the assault, and 3/5 supporting by fire, at least, so said the operation order. Carrying it out was delayed by the mistake in communication and by the morale status of the company. Fox 2/5 was still shaken from the friendly fire incident of the day before. It did not jump off until 0700. This led to an excellent opportunity that would not have been manifested if the Marines had attacked while still dark. Now that the sun was up and Fox Company could see NKPA troops on the objective eating meals, shaking blankets to dust them, and “walking around unconcernedly.”⁴⁹ Fox 2/5 made an artillery request and decimated these North Koreans, though it took rigid fire discipline to keep the Marines, frustrated and impatient on seeing the enemy in the open within range, from opening up on them.⁵⁰

Gerald P. Averill described the incident:

Indirectly, it [the delay] turned out favorably, for as first light outlined Hills 1052 and 980—the light fully in the eyes of the defenders—the troops of Hill 812 came out to enjoy the warmth of the sun, to wash their faces, brush their teeth, and cook rice. We watched them through binoculars from the “D” Company ridge, and as soon as everyone on Hill 812 was settling in for a pleasant breakfast we blew them away with a nicely delivered artillery concentration. It started the day off right, but from that moment on, things got rough.⁵¹

This successful surprise helped the Marines make significant advances towards Hill 812 by Fox Company with Dog Company supporting by fire. The advance was also helped by the Fox 2nd Platoon’s location, almost on the crest and hidden in the trees. The enemy had not spotted them even when sunning and eating. “From this point on, the enemy became very cautious about exposing himself,” said the battalion Historical

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁰ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 195; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 21; “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 39.

⁵¹ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 266-67.

Diary in a radical understatement. Many of the soldiers who survived fled to the bunkers on the reverse slope of 812. Such progress was not to be long lived.⁵²

The 1st Platoon of Fox, now under Captain Sawina, started up a small finger ridge in front of its night positions to set up a base of fire to support the assault. This finger ridge was not as well defended as the main finger. It gave the platoon the advantage of some defilade to set up MGs to fire on the enemy bunkers. Fox's CO thought this to be the fatal chink in the enemy's defense. At 0745 the 1st Platoon and part of the 3rd began this limited objective attack to regain the ground lost when these withdrew the previous evening. Thereafter, they were to consolidate for the night while the 2nd Platoon and Easy Company pressed the attack. (The 3rd Platoon had had many casualties and part of it was left at the Fox CP for local security. The elements of this platoon with Sawina would set up with his 1st Platoon to cover the assault up the northwest finger ridge.)⁵³

The point Sawina's men were aiming for was the afore-mentioned finger ridge. At 0830, the platoons reached this "finger" despite some casualties and stiffening resistance (much of the progress was made because of concealment offered by the trees). When the fireteam on 1st Platoon's "point" (all volunteers) learned they were to consolidate now and await nightfall while Easy Company got to make the day's main attack, they were crestfallen. This gung-ho foursome of "devil dogs" (as Marines were called by the Germans in WWI) each had a Thompson submachine-gun and fancied himself eager for action and wanted to be the first Marines on the crest of 812. Later on,

⁵² "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41.

however, after the bitter assault ahead played out before their eyes, they were much less ardent in their thirst for battle and were glad to not have had the assault.⁵⁴

The Marines on this key finger-ridge had recently finished consolidating when a heavy thunderstorm of artillery and mortar-fire shredded the hillside all around them followed by a searching spray of thousands of MG rounds fanning all over their positions. Corporal Callahan (no first name supplied), a squad leader, had one of his Marines fall wounded. He cradled the man in his arms and made his way through “ a hail of grazing fire delivered by crossfiring enemy machine guns” to cover where the wounded Marine could get first aid. He then moved from foxhole to foxhole among his squad, designating targets for his Marines. “His coolness under fire was indicative of that represented by Marines this day.”⁵⁵

This finger-ridge was about 150 yards from the base of the larger finger ridge to the north. Two Marine light MGs were set up on either side of the finger. The original plan was to attack simultaneously from two directions, one prong heading up the east finger ridge, the other up the south finger. This was changed before jump-off to be a three prong attack, one platoon per prong. Easy would pass through Fox with two of its platoons and the third platoon would be the 2nd Platoon of Fox. This Platoon (it will be remembered) was at a point only 100 meters from the objective, concealed from the enemy by thick foliage. Colonel Stiff, CO of 2/5 made the estimate that 812 was defended by one NKPA company. Fox was to support Easy’s assault with fire.⁵⁶

At dawn, the battalion also sent forward an “Observation Post/Command Post” or OP-CP, composed of the S-3 and a miniature HQ. It set up at the approximate position

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Fox's CP had been the night before as a "classic' observation post, from which an excellent view could be had of all that transpired on the ridge of Objective Dog."⁵⁷

After Fox Company had the base of fire set up, Easy Company leapfrogged forward through it at 0850 with Fox's 2nd Platoon attached.⁵⁸

The Marines of Easy Company requested air support, but no planes showed up in time (this despite 2/5 having priority of air support and all aircraft on station were to report every hour for possible strikes). It was not, in this case, because the planes were late, but because of a communications failure that did not allow the 2nd Battalion FAC to communicate with them to control a strike. Therefore the planes were sent to 3/5's FAC instead. "As the troops awaited the air-strike, the Battalion S-3 relayed Lieutenant Colonel Stiff's orders to attack at once following the actual aerial attack, to take advantage of the expected state of shock the enemy will have suffered thereby," even if Easy's 2nd Platoon was not quite at the LD (Line of Departure). But since the planes did not show, this platoon was on the LD in plenty of time.⁵⁹

Finally, at 0755 fighter planes strafed and rocketed positions in front of 2/5 and beyond 812. "However, this strike was disappointing, as the area of impact was too far beyond the area of our immediate attack to be very helpful." Later at 0920 and 1045 the battalion again tried to direct airstrikes but could not make contact with the TACP radio and so could not call priority missions. With no adequate air-strike the assault would have to be made with only artillery and mortar support. Fox in particular kept the objective under a continuous hail from its 60 mm mortars. Also in support, Dog

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 195; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 21; Maj Gerald P. Averill, "Final Objective," 14.

⁵⁹ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 40.

Company fired 75mm recoilless rifles towards where a big bunker could be seen. It was judged to be successfully neutralized.⁶⁰

Easy's 2nd Platoon under Lieutenant Hinson (no first name supplied) made its way through the Fox CP and up the slopes of a finger ridge to Fox Company's northwest. (See Map # 33) It had not gone any farther than half way, however, before a withering crossfire coming directly down the finger ridge had pinned it down. Four Marines fell wounded almost at the first burst. Hinson then decided that the south slope was untenable and moved to the reverse slope of the ridge where there was some defilade. There the platoon waited for further orders (all before H-hour). At 0850, the rest of Easy was ready to jump off.⁶¹

About the same time, 0800, Charlie Company from 1/5 came into 2/5's area to set up a blocking position on 2/5's right flank, Hill 749. Later on, however, this plan changed and Charlie left back to 1/5's zone.⁶²

By 1030, only a hundred yards of progress had been made (by Easy) and the enemy converging fire was still coming in. The CO of 2/5 then "ordered an all-out drive for the objective, following a preliminary barrage of everything that could be thrown at the enemy—artillery, 75mm recoilless, rockets, and 81mm and 4.2 inch mortars."⁶³

Meanwhile, Fox's 2nd platoon under Lieutenant Roth, the one concealed in the trees near the objective, had been ready to attack by 0550. But the base of fire for its support and Easy Company's advance took so much time that this platoon did not step

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁶³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 195; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 21; "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 40.

out until 1100. When the fire was raised, Easy Company would push ahead up the ridgeline, while Fox Company's 2nd Platoon flanked the objective.⁶⁴

The base of fire cut loose with its MGs at 1100 on NKPA MG bunkers, and Roth's platoon surged forward with three squads in the assault. As soon as these Marines stepped from the tree-line, the enemy noted the platoon's position and cut down four of the Marines with bursts of MG fire. At the same time, Hinson's platoon, only 150 yards from the summit, too, advanced. Hinson could not see any bunkers on his finger ridge, he had to keep in defilade on the south or reverse slope so as not to be hit by MG fire from the crest of 812. The movement forward of Easy was slow; intense enemy fire from rifle-pits as well as bunkers on 812's east face swept the ground in a steel rain. All of the enemy positions were well camouflaged and very difficult to spot. Soon, Hinson's men moved into the beaten zone of Fox's 3rd Platoon (under Lt Markham—no first name supplied), and that Platoon's portion of the base of fire ceased and readied to also attack. This platoon had a difficult mission. It was to assault frontally up the finger ridge right into the teeth of the enemy bunker's fire. Thirty minutes prior to this, the Heavy MG Platoon, set up in battery on the ridge with Dog Company, had sprayed a steady dispersion of bullets over the head of the attacking Marines, keeping its beaten zone about 100 yards ahead of the advance.⁶⁵

This use of the heavy MGs in battery, however, proved to be a mistake. Averill described the result:

Everyone wanted to get into the game. The six Browning heavy machine guns were set up in battery instead of by section. Slightly down from the machine guns was a section of 75mm recoilless rifles from the regimental antitank

⁶⁴ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 41; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 195; 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary," September 1951, 21.

⁶⁵ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 42.

company, attached to the battalion for operations. Hill 812 was within range of both the machine guns and the recoilless rifles.

Just a short time after the last round of the artillery concentration had been expended [from the barrage against the NKPA caught eating breakfast], the North Koreans could be seen swarming around the hilltop in great numbers. I guess the colonel must have been reading Rommel's *Infantry Attacks* prior to coming out to Korea. In any event, he favored supporting the attack on Hill 812 with long range machine gun fire. Rommel had made himself famous by such utilization of machine guns in the Great War. Why not give it a try? What to do? My advice was offered and rejected. The guns went into action. Across the valley the .30 caliber slugs flew, hundreds of them striking the hard ground, kicking up little puffs of dust around the bunkers. And then the roar of the recoilless rifles, the backflash vivid against the green foliage, high explosive rounds reaching out to tear the tough skin of Hill 812. Up on Hills 980 and 1052, the North Korean forward observers were watching. They turned to their communications, gave fire commands, and turned back to watch the machine guns once more. The 120mm tubes were laid, the bubbles leveled, the rounds dropped in. On over, one short. . . Fire for effect!

Six of our Brownings neutralized, water jackets pierced. Four of the gun crews wounded. The recoilless rifles forced out of position. That sudden. That smooth. Korea was not Austria or even Italy. Korea was Korea. Eventually that fact would sink in.⁶⁶

The attack, however, went on regardless. "All approaches to the hill were covered by enemy automatic weapons fire and the mutually-supporting bunkers were the most effective opposition encountered. These provided a crossfire that left the Marines almost helpless at times; the 3.5 inch rockets [called the super bazooka by the troops since it was a larger version of the old WWII bazooka] might have helped, but couldn't be brought sufficiently close to fire on the positions." The best weapon, the Marines discovered, was direct fire into the embrasures of the enemy bunkers with the Marines light MGs. The Marines set up their guns and simply kept a steady stream of bullets pouring through the embrasure until finally every North Korean within who lifted up to fire was hit. However, "this proved difficult and costly. . . ."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 267-68.

⁶⁷ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 42.

For example is the experience of Corporal Valdez (no first name supplied) of Fox's 1st Platoon. He was the gunner on one of the light MGs in the base of fire. Ten minutes after the assault began four assistant gunners were hit and incapacitated right beside him. The enemy MG fire continued to spray his area, searching for him and traversing back and forth in multiple streams, the dispersion of rounds striking all around. Finally one bullet ricocheted and hit Valdez. Nevertheless, he remained at the trigger, tickling out bursts into enemy bunkers, the canvas belted brass shells feeding into the hungry weapon in a steady procession of fire and chattering death.⁶⁸

Jon Charles Genrich remembered this technique of neutralizing enemy bunkers:

There was a higher ridge on our right flank and [1/7 was] attacking the hill with battalion strength or greater. Richard mentioned that this would maybe take some of the pressure off our position if the enemy needed men and supplies on the other hill. The airplanes were back attacking both hills and the napalm lit up the skies.

Sometime around the middle of the day, Corporal Nash from another machine gun section came over to our gun. He said two enemy machinegun bunkers were giving problems to [1/7]. One machine gun was on the right flank firing at the bunkers, but they needed help. . . . We moved our gun to the top of the ridge so we could see the larger hill more clearly. We started to set the gun up on the hard rocks and Nash said, "You need sandbags or you'll never hit anything." Sorry, but we didn't have sand bags, and I chipped away at the rock with my entrenching tool. I finally had a few notches in the rocks and set the tripod down in the notches. Richard helped me set the gun up and Nash said it was about 800 yards. I took aim at the higher bunker on the left, which was almost straight across from my position. I looked at the aperture and aimed at the top of the bunker about two feet directly above the aperture.

I fired the first burst of about five rounds and the tracer round went right into the aperture the first time. The machine gun in the bunker stopped firing for about 15 seconds. When it started firing again, I fired five or six bursts and we saw a couple of tracers go into the aperture again. The enemy gun stopped firing all together and we switched over to the other machinegun bunker which was lower on the hill and further to the right. The angle wasn't very good so after about 20 minutes we decided to leave it to the third section gun and move back to the left flank position. This would be my proudest hour in Korea for hitting the bunker on the first burst at 800 yards. When new men joined the squad in the future and it was mentioned once or twice, I played it down as no big deal. I knew

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

I was lucky and had used a little Kentucky windage that is not approved of in the Marines.⁶⁹

“This sort of machine gun counter battery fire was costly, burning out three barrels; however the supporting fires it provided got the bullets into the bunkers where they counted, and that is what matters.” A machine gunner was not expected to last long in combat: ‘Somebody come up with a number about how long you last in combat on any one of these weapons. You last 14 minutes as a machine gunner. You last 18 minutes as a mortar man and all this. I don’t know where they get these numbers. Somebody out there with a green eye shade on counting this, you know, theoretical stuff.’⁷⁰

Easy Company’s 2nd Platoon advanced up the ridge through intense mortar fire. Then enemy MGs added to the deluge around the platoon. The Marines of 2nd Platoon Easy Company then set up their own light MGs and returned the enemy’s fire. No Marines were wounded by the enemy MG fire and only two were WIA by mortar fragments, a miracle considering the amount of incoming. This platoon maintained its advance, slowly infiltrating and making maximum use of any cover or concealment available. Artillery soon neutralized the enemy MG emplacements and these stayed silent until the platoon neared the crest of the finger ridge. Just then a single burst wounded all four Marines of the point fire team and hit a radioman as well. Soon mortar fire added to the confusion and disorganized the platoon.⁷¹

Lt Hinson leapt up under the enemy fire and restored order in the platoon. He then led it in a successful assault. The 2nd Platoon had the greatest distance to cover and so would be the last on the crest. About this time, Easy Company requested from

⁶⁹ Oral memoir of Jon Charles Genrich at KoreanWarEducator.org.

⁷⁰ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 43; Ralph B. Steele Interview, Library of Congress.

⁷¹ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 43.

supply one-half unit of fire for all of its organic weapons. Soon after, a train of carradores was dispatched with the requested allotment.⁷²

Meanwhile, Fox Company's 2nd Platoon bogged down due to many casualties and intense enemy fire. The NKPA bunkers were hard nuts to crack and continued to deliver withering MG fire into the Marine ranks, filling the air with a swarm of snapping bullets. Finally a bunker would fall to a Marine grenade, satchel charge, or MG and small arms fire, and the advance would continue until another bunker slowed it down. "At no time did our forward movement cease entirely; at least one unit was maneuvering at all times, thus the enemy was not able to gain the time or opportunity to counterattack."⁷³

One bunker in particular stalled Fox's 2nd Platoon on the very crest of a finger ridge of 812. Lt. Roth crawled and shuffled around his men to get a look and then directed them to move on the south slope where there was some defilade and woods to offer concealment. By this the platoon was able to outflank the bunker and avoid the most deadly portion of its field of fire. Sgt Livingston (no first name supplied), the leader of 1st Squad, led the final assault on this bunker. MG fire ripped across both his legs and shrapnel tore into his hip and chest. Nevertheless, he refused immediate aid until other even more-seriously wounded Marines were helped, and he drug himself forward. He "continued to shout directions and encouragement to his advancing fire teams. His inspiration and display of magnificent courage materially aided his squad to press the

⁷² "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 43.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

assault, overrun the enemy position and capture the machine gun, leaving the area strewn with enemy dead and wounded.”⁷⁴

A North Korean soldier darted from the bunker and made a beeline for the NKPA rear. “Hey! Shoot the bastard!” shouted one Marine fumbling with a jammed rifle. A nineteen-year-old downy-faced Marine, called the “‘chicken’ of the platoon” because of his youth and blonde hair hurled himself after the Korean soldier, screaming a battle cry to chill the fleeing enemy’s blood. He speared the North Korean in the seat of his trousers with his bayonet-tipped M-1. The NKPA dashed on another twenty yards, the Marine close behind still clinging to the rifle, the embedded bayonet linking the twain, until “chicken” managed to squeeze the trigger. “As the soldier fell on his face, the Marine stopped, casually leaned his rifle against his left arm, took a tiny KODAK camera from his pocket and snapped a picture of the still-squirming Korean.”⁷⁵

At the military crest of the finger ridge, the company “gunny,” Staff Sergeant Stanley J. Wawrzyniak found an occupied enemy bunker that would decimate the “left flank of the first assaulting squad” if it was not silenced. He did not hesitate. He leapt to his feet and dashed through intense small arms fire and showers of grenade fragments to personally slay all three enemy denizens of the emplacement despite wounds from shrapnel. His personal weapon was out of ammunition, so he seized the BAR of a fallen Marine and continued to attack enemy entrenchments. He “aggressively aided the squad in overrunning the position, directed the pursuit of the fleeing enemy and

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

consolidated the ground.” Wawrzyniak would receive the Navy Cross (his first of two in Korea).⁷⁶

The squad’s 1st Fire Team made an attack against “a particularly troublesome bunker.” “A sudden hail of grenades and bullets” made the Marines hug the ground. Corporal Barczuk (no first name supplied) was the fire team leader. He belly-crawled toward the bunker, “turkey looked” (a technique whereby a Marine under cover quickly lifts his head to see and then immediately ducks back down) to assess the situation a few times, and carefully planned a final assault. He used all available cover and concealment to maneuver his men closer to the emplacement and led them in a final rush on the position with bayonets fixed. Barczuk had already been wounded by shrapnel, but was still the first to reach the bunker to lob several grenades through the aperture. Seconds later there was a crunching “WHUMP, WHUMP, WHUMP” as these burst white hot steel in the confined space, and there was nothing left of the four soldiers within but bloody, smoking husks. Barczuk was not done. He ignored his own wounds to take charge of the 1st Squad when Sgt Livingston was hit, and directed the final assault.⁷⁷

Fox’s 2nd Platoon set to eliminating the last of the enemy resistance on that slope. The remaining North Koreans there fled their bunkers when they heard the “Banzai!” screaming Marines descending towards them. By 1136, the “grim-faced, bayonet wielding troops . . . had secured the entire finger ridge and occupied the enemy

⁷⁶ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 44; Navy Cross Award Citation for Stanley J. Wawrzyniak.

⁷⁷ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 44-45.

strongpoint . . . [on the crest] with minimum cost to themselves.” The crest of 812 itself, however, was not yet secured.⁷⁸

Fox’s 2nd Platoon was making the most progress of the assaulting elements. Easy Company’s platoons faced “murderous fire from the many positions dotting the ridge and particularly from enemy positions on the crest of the rise just beyond the summit of 812.” Easy Company’s 2nd Platoon found itself under heavy mortar fire at 1330. The 3rd Platoon faced a bunker on the forward slope that was both stubborn and deadly. It continued to maintain accurate streams of fire that scythed through the platoon’s ranks. “Each time the men moved toward the hilltop, the machine gun in the bunker, a heavy, M1910 Maxim-type Soviet weapon, chattered and forced them to hug the earth again.” This bunker was a tough one. It finally took two direct hits from 75mm recoilless rifles (fired from the positions near Dog Company 1,250 meters away before these were forced out of position) to neutralize it, and even then only the firing ports on the east side had been caved in, other ports were still active. “It was believed by Easy Company officers that this single fortified position was responsible for a majority of these casualties, so strategically located was the bunker.” Such is an example of the tenacity of the NKPA positions.⁷⁹

Hospitalman Hunter (no first name supplied) was a corpsman with the platoon. Despite painful wounds to the body and legs he refused to be evacuated so that the stretcher would be available to a more-severely wounded man. He shakily rose to his feet and attempted to make it to the aid station on his own steam, but collapsed from

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 45. Perhaps if on-call, accurate CAS had been available to the unit, these casualties would not have been as heavy because the Marines could have covered most if not all of the gap between themselves and the key defenses before the enemies that were not destroyed by the strike again raised their heads to fire. (See chapter on Close Air Support).

loss of blood. The Marines then placed him on a stretcher regardless of his continued protests (he had come to) and started for the rear. The group came across some Marines wounded by a blast from a mine. Hunter insisted that his stretcher be brought along side, and he rendered first aid to the wounded Marines from his position upon his stretcher. "His prompt and skillful action undoubtedly saved the life of at least one Marine."⁸⁰

The 3rd Platoon continued its assault. But so "sparse [was the] cover . . . available to 3rd Platoon Marines before they reached the crest . . . [and] so effectively had the enemy 'sighted in' their automatic weapons along the eastern finger ridge, that casualties were inevitable." Frontal assault was the only option. Lt Markham (no first name supplied), the Platoon Leader, was notorious for having strapped fourteen grenades to his 782 gear that morning. He was directing the assault when he was shot in the chest and severely wounded. The Easy Company "gunny," TechSgt Patrick (no first name supplied) took over until the Company Executive Officer, Lt Kuhn, could make it from the CP. Meanwhile, Patrick decisively directed the platoon and achieved fire superiority over the enemy and continued to advance. Lt Kuhn took over, but was not in charge fifteen minutes before he was struck in the face and side. Patrick again found himself in command.⁸¹

"At least three enemy heavy machine guns" and a plethora of light MGs opposed the assaulting elements of the Marines. "It was obvious to observers that fire superiority was gained by the sheer courage of the assaulting Marines. 'Had the assaulting forces doubted at any time that they could attain their objective, they gave no indication of it,'

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

said one officer.” The Marines were without cover for the last 50 to 65 meters of the assault on every side of the hill. To close with the enemy, they had to dash across a gap where they would be fully exposed to enemy fire. “The top of 812 is completely barren of all except stumps, sandy soil and the lightest shrubbery; what the enemy had not cleared away in constructing his fortifications and fields of fire had been uprooted and knocked down by friendly artillery fire and aerial bombardment, indicated by multitudinous pockmarks in the earth.”⁸²

The North Koreans had done away with brush, so if the hill were hit with napalm, it would have little fuel to continue to burn. Another preventative measure utilized was to erect lips of dirt around a bunker to divert the flow of the napalm.⁸³

The 3rd Platoon made the bald crest at 1212, but the enemy had another surprise in store. Hundreds of enemy soldiers readied potato-masher grenades and slipped a finger simultaneously through the pull-loop of at least a pair. They listened and waited. Marine feet crunched closer. Then the NKPA “literally cast up a storm of hand grenades so that the mountainside looked ‘as if it had exploded,’ so many and close together were they detonating. Lieutenant Hinson estimated that three hundred grenades were exploded within fifteen minutes on the ridge!” The NKPA did not stick their heads up to throw. They simply cast them blind when they knew the Marines were close and wounded many not from accuracy but by volume.⁸⁴

At 1345, Fox’s 2nd Platoon gained the summit of 812 proper (the prior crest had been a finger ridge) and attacked a series of rifle pits and bunkers from the flank; the platoon’s positioning took many emplacements designed for a forward slope defense

⁸² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸³ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 92.

⁸⁴ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 46.

from their blind side. NKPA fled their holes and ran northwest to hole up in reverse-slope bunkers and again kill Marines. The Marine attack succeeded with this flank attack achieving complete surprise. Fox-2's (Fox Company, Second Platoon) had achieved the summit after only thirty-six minutes (for Fox Company's 2nd Platoon -- it was many hours for the others) of close quarters combat with grenades, rifles, and machine guns. The fighting was close and fierce, going to bayonets, clubbed rifles, rocks, fists, and anything else at hand. "The platoon quickly . . . overcame enemy resistance and occupied the position without excessive losses." In this platoon's sector at least, the enemy seemed to have run out of grenades.⁸⁵

One last bunker remained in Fox-2's area. It was "sizeable" and in the saddle between two knobs atop the hill. In it a Maxim-heavy shot scathing fire down the length of the ridgeline. It took a 3.5 inch bazooka four rounds to neutralize the position. (The rocket-team fired from 250 yards off and shook up the enemy within enough that other Marines could demolish it.) The most effective weapon, again, the 5th Marines discovered, for taking out enemy MGs was counter-fire from its own light MGs. "It was observed that [at least] three machine guns on the hill had been pierced and probably destroyed by .30 caliber bullets." Flamethrowers might have worked better, but could not be used that day because of "high head winds."⁸⁶

The slopes were strewn with dead enemy, but not all were really dead. "One seemingly dead North Korean Soldier lay crumpled beside a bunker, his rifle broken, his pockets turned inside out, for a long period of time." (Men from the S-2 section usually came and searched the bodies right away to glean any documents for intelligence

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47, 50.

before a Marine could purloin them as a souvenir.) All the passing Marines thought him dead. “Finally, well after the ridge had been secured,” a Marine found a live NKPA in a nearby bunker and shot him when he refused to surrender. The “dead” NKPA on the slope heard this and sat up whereupon the Marines took him prisoner.⁸⁷

One Marine who was there described the fight: “With the lifting of supporting fires, the 2d Platoon, “F” Company charged into the North Korean strong point. Thirty-five minutes later, after hand-to-hand combat and grenade duels, the southern portion of Hill 812 was secure, allowing the 1st Platoon of “E” Company to clear the northern tip, to pass through the ‘F’ Company platoon and attack toward the base of Hill 980.”⁸⁸

By this time, Fox-2 and Easy-3 had set up a hasty defense on the objective and reorganized and resupplied themselves with ammo. Very little was left for Easy-1 to “mop up.” The objective was pretty well consolidated. The squad of 60mm mortars attached to Easy-2 then set up to provide support for a further attack if ordered. This completed the seizure of Hill 812. “Since regimental orders had specified ‘before nightfall,’ Objective Dog had been seized ahead of schedule.”⁸⁹

“As the assault had been a bloody one, wounded Marines were on both slopes of” the razor ridge. PFC Bennett (no first name supplied) was a mortar ammo carrier. The hilltop was now secure but the ridge extending past it to the west was still enemy territory and SA and AW fire was still coming in, in addition to the mortar and artillery fire from Hills 980 and 1052. He “crawled over the lip of the ridge” into the face of this fire to drag a wounded Marine to the cover offered by the reverse slope. Bennett continually

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸⁸ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 268.

⁸⁹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 196; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 21; “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 47.

volunteered throughout the rest of the day to evacuate seriously wounded Marines and made several trips as stretcher bearer to the aide station. He promptly returned with more 60mm mortar ammo that his gun badly needed. (His valor led to his death two days later when he volunteered, though near exhaustion, to aide a fallen comrade. He was walking upright down the hill—too tired to crouch down—when he was instantly killed by enemy shrapnel.)⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 47.

CHAPTER 10

THE ROCK AND 854

It was still September 17. Next up, the Marines continued to assault west towards 980 atop the ridge from 812. (Both battalions, 2/5 and 1/5, sent patrols from the right and left to Hill 812.) Easy-1, under Lt Matas (no first name supplied) got the point with Fox-2 following in close support. Preparatory fire for this advance was supplied by 93 rounds of artillery called in by the Easy Company FO. Prior to this, the 4.2 inch mortars had been unable to support the attack because of the uncertain location of the assaulting elements. Now they began to add their heavy mortar shells to the many tons of steel already pounded into the churned earth of the mountains from just under 3000 meters off. Their primary targets were roads and trails to the rear of enemy positions in hopes of catching enemy elements in the midst of resupplying and reinforcing their forces.¹

Easy-1 soon found itself pinned down by the enemy's own heavy mortars, 120mm high explosive shells so large and heavy they could be seen warbling through the air on their way to a target like some huge bumble-bee. Nine Marines were WIA by this deluge. Soon, however, the Marine FO of the 81mm mortar section with the platoon spotted the enemy firing position. He called in several rounds from his section and the 120mm fire dried up. The attack continued.²

The attack, coming so soon after the seizure of 812, caught the enemy flat-footed and the Marines made significant progress in the advance. The only resistance was

¹ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 47-48.

² *Ibid.*

scattered small arms fire until the Marines reached “the strange, unforgettable, granite projection called ‘The Rock, or ‘Rocky Nose,’ a distinct feature on the ridge line that would feature prominently in the battle over the next few days, and in the sector over the next few years. Just beyond it, Easy-1 met “determined enemy resistance.” The area was riddled with bunkers and entrenchments including MGs. Heavy fire finally pinned the Marines down 100 yards past the Rock, mostly because of intense plunging MG fire from 3/5’s “Objective Two,” Hill 980.³ (See Illustration #1)

The company (Easy) heard of the progress before this unit was pinned down and called regiment and asked if it could seize 980 as well as 812. Regiment denied the request since Hill 1052 dominated 980 (in fact, heavy fire was received from that height, too). Hill 980 could not be held if taken until the enemy on 1052 had been silenced. So Easy Company, Easy-1 specifically, had to withdraw 600 yards back towards 812. While disengaging, this unit continued to receive enemy SA and AW fire “from their front and left flank.” Covering fire of 333 rounds of artillery had to be supplied to complete the withdrawal. Easy-1 had only two rifle squads and one light MG squad left at this point. Marines of 2/5 were in defensive positions by 1700.⁴

Gerald P. Averill thought the decision not to take 980 was foolish:

In a short period of two weeks, the hill complex of which 812 was a part had ground up the 1st Marines and the 7th Marines on the eastern slopes and now was whittling away on the 5th Marines to the west. Hills 673 and 749, connected by a ridge line running south to north, had decimated the other two regiments. Hill 812, which was in essence a western extension of the north-south ridge line upon which Hills 673 and 749 were located, had cost our battalion dearly. With Hill 812 secured, we still would suffer heavy casualties, for we had no *safe* ground from which to operate. We could defend the north-south ridge line of 812

³ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 196; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 21; Maj Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” 15; “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 48.

⁴ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 196; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 21; Maj Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” 15.

from the east just as the North Koreans had from the west, but here the similarity ended. To the west, leading from Hill 812, lay those two dominating peaks, 980 and 1052, from which the North Koreans could observe our every movement on the south side of the east-west ridge line *and* the western slopes of the north-south ridge line. Movement in daylight was extremely dangerous anywhere within the position that we held. . . . Two rifle companies, watched in daylight, hanging on by their fingernails and not much else. I often have thought of how satisfying it would have been to have exposed the planners at division, X Corps, and Eighth Army to a couple of days on Hill 812. I have an idea that considerably more attention would have been paid to Hills 980 and 1052 had those gentlemen spent even one *hour* on those ridge lines in daytime.⁵

The decision had come, not just because of the problem with 1052, but because that morning the Division Chief of Staff, Colonel Victor “Brute” Krulak (who, ironically, wrote the foreword to Averill’s book) “had observed the attack from the Regimental OP . . . and at this point announced that the seizure of Hill 812 accomplished, for the time being, the Division’s mission.” Therefore, the 5th Marines CO, Colonel Weede ordered a halt to 2/5’s attack. They were to dig in on the most defensible ground. However, according to Averill, 812 was not very defensible as long as 980 and 1052 remained in enemy hands.⁶

That evening, the 5th Marines were ordered to consolidate on the best terrain nearby and dig in. The Marines of 3/5 were dispersed across the area north of Hill 751. They were not tied in with 2/5 as would be preferred. The latter battalion, 2/5, defended Hill 812. Easy Company 2/5 was to the west of 812 in its defense, on the ridge between 812 and 980. Dog Company consolidated with Weapons Company on the southern part of 812 with orders to protect the left flank. Fox 2/5 settled in to the east of 812. The 5th Marines also tied in with elements of the 1st Marines to the south.⁷ (See Map # 35)

⁵ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 269. In light of this situation, Van Fleet’s statement, quoted a few pages hence, seems laughable.

⁶ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 48.

⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 196; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 21.

Easy-1 put one of its squads near the Rock as an outpost. “The other rifle squad and the machine gun squad were spread along the ridgeline, commencing sixty yards east of ‘The Rock,’ to give an appearance of depth as any attack was expected to come west to east along the spine of the ridge.” In addition, the AT Assault Platoon was sent to reinforce Fox Company.⁸

Sniper-accurate fire from enemy 76mm high velocity artillery hit the Marines through the rest of the daylight hours. These guns were described by one Marine as an “UNGODLIKE NOISE,” that made one’s ears ring constantly and shook up the nerves real bad.⁹

Ralph Steele described the 76 this way:

. . . what was firing at us then was what they call a 76. It’s a Soviet artillery piece they used at Stalingrad where it got it’s fame, and it got tires, wheels and of course it’s tough to get them up in the mountains, but those guys, they’re rugged. Those little Gooks got that thing up. And it’s high velocity piece. . . . in all honesty, it wasn’t that effective because . . . it doesn’t make a very big fragment field . . . but it’s so high velocity the projectile is going about the same speed, 2,600 feet per second that a rifle bullet does. It comes so fast that a lot of times you see the detonation [then] hear the sound of it’s coming, where otherwise you always hear a shuuu and then the boom. . . .¹⁰

The northern slopes of 812 were particularly vulnerable. Both Easy and Fox Companies came under fire from Hills 980 and 1052. However, “as the Marines had dropped their packs—with entrenching tools attached—several hundred yards behind on the ridge, practically none was equipped to dig foxholes.” Easy-1’s Platoon Leader sent a working party back to get the “E-tools,” but even after the party brought back the shovels, the enemy fire was such that the Marines could not venture to the forward

⁸ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 48-49.

⁹ A. Andy Andow, *Letters to Big Jim*, 64-65.

¹⁰ Transcript of Interview with Ralph B. Steele, Library of Congress.

slope at all to dig in. The second a man showed himself above the crest, WHOOOSHH, in came an enemy round. After dark some positions were successfully scraped into the forward slope while the enemy observers could not see.¹¹

For the 5th Marines that night the enemy incoming grew very intense. “One officer stated that the North Koreans ‘threw everything but the proverbial kitchen sink at us, including all popular sizes of Soviet artillery and mortar shells.’” The 5th Marines Intelligence Officer (S-2) “reported an estimated one hundred twenty-four enemy artillery pieces,” in the 5th Marines zone alone. All night long, 2/5 replied with its own 81mm and 60mm mortars.¹²

That night Hospitalman Kivette (no first name supplied) passed through the Weapons Company area tending casualties and was told that a wounded Marine was a few hundred yards to the front of the lines who had not been brought in. Kivette headed up the trail to find the injured man alone in the dark with incoming mortar and artillery fire interdicting the whole area since it was a logical route of resupply for the Marines on Hill 812. He found and treated the wounded Marine and then commandeered several passing Korean ammo bearers into stretcher duty to get him to safety. The man would have one small boon; at the forward aid station that night, all wounded were offered pears and “pogey bait” (a Marine term for candy).¹³

At 1730, friendly artillery began hitting in 2/5’s vicinity. A call went back for the 1st Marines (from whence the rounds seemed to be coming) to keep all called fires to the east of the battalion’s boundary. KSC laborers had it rough that night. Between 0200 on

¹¹ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 48-49; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 196; 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 21.

¹² “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 50, 53.

¹³ *Ibid.*

September 17 and 0200 on the 18th, they had made four round trips to the front with food, water, ammo, and supplies. Each trip took four hours, much of it up extremely steep hills, while burdened with between sixty and eighty pounds per man. That same night, a stretcher party carrying Easy Company wounded got hit by enemy artillery. More than one wounded Marine found himself the victim of a second or third hit before they were brought to cover.¹⁴

Earlier that day, 2/5 had asked for resupply via helicopter. This was turned down in the morning, but at 1400 in the afternoon, the Btn CP received word the request would be granted. The first flight of four Sikorsky PRS-1 Cargo Helicopters brought in 4,792 pounds of supplies. Each carried three or four casualties with it on its return trip (these choppers could carry more than ordinary choppers).¹⁵

That night, too, Fox Company picked up two NKPA deserters who sought American lines and surrendered. They reported that their unit had received over 600 men in reinforcement the previous night. Another POW, this one taken in the fighting, claimed his company had had 140 men ten days ago, but now was reduced to only eighty. Other NKPA straggled into Marine lines here and there throughout the night, voluntarily surrendering. Some said their unit was to be relieved that night and so they had escaped before taken back behind the lines and far from the Americans—it was much harder to escape then. (Many NKPA troops were former ROKs who had been forced to join the enemy, so this does not necessarily indicate a widespread change of heart on the part of Communists to capitalists, furthermore, the enemy soldiers were

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

known to have little food, poor medical supplies and equipment, and draconian discipline).¹⁶

At 2135, 2/5 received the 5th Marines Frag Order 140-51. It directed that the regiment consolidate on the best defensive ground “in the vicinity of its positions and prepare to construct deliberate defenses on a line to be announced later. The 2nd Battalion was directed to patrol in zone north to the south bank of the Soyang-gang River” and to the 3rd Battalion boundary on the left flank.¹⁷

The 1st Marines saw action September 17 in the daylight hours as well.

As mentioned previously, that day at 1007, 1/1 sent a platoon sized combat patrol (Charlie Company) towards where enemy lines had been the night before after an “intense artillery preparation.” But the enemy had withdrawn back to other positions. Thus 1/1 advanced against no resistance and consolidated for the night on the ridge between 812 and 749. The rest of 1/1 and 2/1 remained in their blocking positions.¹⁸ (See Map # 34)

The KMCs of 1/KMC repulsed a counterattack atop Hill 751 that afternoon (they had advanced there on the 16th). The other two KMC battalions filled in the rest of the defenses on Yoke Ridge (Hays Line), which 1/KMC had occupied.¹⁹

One other development that had occurred the day before made the Division commander stop the advance after the gains made on the 17th. “On 16 September, the Eighth Army had ordered X Corps to suspend all major offensive operations after 20 September. Van Fleet had decided that further attacks along the Hays Line could not be

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁸ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 18.

¹⁹ 1 Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 21.

justified. The 1st Marine Division would now have to hold the ground it had seized, however unfinished its work.” The fighting was not over, but the deliberate attacks towards new objectives were.²⁰

Van Fleet visited the 1st Mar Div CP and that of the 2nd Infantry Division September 16, 1951 “to inspect the operations and determine the morale of the 1st Marine Division and 2nd Infantry Division, both of which had suffered heavy casualties. He found the morale of these X Corps units good and had no adverse criticism of their operations.” He then issued an order “that the Corps Commander firm up his line by September 20 and to plan no further offensives after that date, as it was unprofitable to continue the bitter operation.” He “reiterated his instructions on the 18th in a confirming directive to the effect that X Corps continue making limited attacks ‘until 20 September, after which . . . units were to firm up the existing line and patrol vigorously forward of it.’”²¹

Of course, objectives still being attacked such as Heartbreak Ridge and Hill 854 would go past the 20th. What the order meant was that the line had been decided on for EUSAK and no new objectives or attacks beyond battalion strength would be had without express approval—meaning basically not at all.²²

Division artillery expended 1,178 rounds in support of the 1st Marines that day and inflicted 50 estimated casualties.²³

²⁰ Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 310; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 199-203.

²¹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 199; EUSAK, “Command Report,” September 1951, 47; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 201; Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 948.

²² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 199-203, 221, 229, 224, 233, 249; Lee Ballenger, *The Outpost War*, 3-4.

²³ 1st Marine Regiment, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 19.

The butcher-bill for September 17 was: 12 KIA and 84 WIA among the American Marines, and 1 KIA and 4 WIA among the KMCs. Enemy losses were: 155 counted KIA, 100 estimated KIA (255 total), and 191 estimated WIA. Marines took 37 POWs.²⁴

Day Eight: September 18

The 1st Mar Div spent September 18 digging in and consolidating on already-won positions. The KMCs of 2/KMC fought off two platoon sized attacks before daylight at Hills 930 and 1026, and the hour of 0430, September 18, brought a heavy counterattack against Easy Company compelling them to fall back a short distance. However, the Marines held off a second attack before 0900. Hills 980 and 1052 continued to fire on Marine lines the rest of the day. The worst losses were in 2/5, but the day wrought 16 KIA and 98 wounded among the Marines of the 1st Mar Div. EUSAK estimated that the total number of casualties inflicted on the enemy from May to mid September were 188,237.²⁵

That night was a fairly quiet one, considering what had become normal in the sector the last few days. And the next day dawned with 980 and 1052 still dominating Marine positions.

For Easy and Fox companies, 2/5, the night was not quiet. The enemy struck Easy Company's western outpost, which withdrew. He struck again at 0845. The enemy was not in large strength, however, and withdrew after a hot firefight. This enemy force was

²⁴ 1 Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 21.

²⁵ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 196; 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 22; EUSAK, "Command Report," October 1951, 5-6, 29-30, and Plate 1; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 202-203.

estimated to have originally been a large one. However, it blundered into one of its own minefields and took casualties. Marines could here moaning besides the explosions. Only four actually made it through the mines, and the Marine fire, to reach the lines and try to infiltrate. The Easy-1 outpost was reoccupied at dawn by the Marines.²⁶

The enemy again probed the Fox and Easy positions on 812 at 0845. One POW captured this date reported that the NKPA had been busy through the night mining the ridge to 980 and the approaches from 812 to 1052, also adding boob traps to “reap a ‘harvest’” should the Marines attack beyond the Rock.²⁷

The enemy caused other problems for the Marines than direct offensive or defensive action. The battalion TACP radio net was jammed that morning by music and “repetitious, nonsensical calls that included the repetition of words like ‘U. S. A.’ over and over for five or ten minutes.” The Marines had to use very high frequency that day to avoid this. However, 2/5 did not attempt to call any CAS that day, so the enemy efforts were of little avail beyond annoyance.²⁸

Fox-1 received a new commander. Captain Sawina turned over command to Lt. De Nobriga (no first name supplied) that morning. The visibility, too was low throughout the day, but nevertheless, the enemy observers on 1052 and 980 were quick to fire on any Marine foolish enough to venture atop the skyline on Hill 812 or over to the forward slope. Sixteen casualties were had from enemy incoming in a single two hour period that morning. Fox had 1 KIA and 4 WIA, and there were 4 WIA from Easy while these Marines were trying to dig emplacements. “These incoming rounds were noted to have struck the ridge without fail at approximately the hour of reveille, then during normal

²⁶ Maj Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” 15; “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 54.

²⁷ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 54.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

meal hours.” This kept most 2/5 Marines in their holes throughout the day. They had to choke down cold “C” rations. Some few fortunate ones had wood alcohol fuel tablets and managed to improvise a warm meal within their fox hole. If one had to “do his business,” it was usually in an empty ration can or container that would be tossed down the hillside afterwards.²⁹

The supply problem was acute. Because of this, only ammo and food were brought to the front lines. Mostly ammo. Stretchers were in extremely short supply. Over 200 had been “absorbed” (meaning cycled somewhere in use and were now missing) in two days. A common expedient was to sling a man in his poncho to carry him, sort of like a hammock, with one man per corner to carry it. This was often messy, however, as blood would congeal in the bottom of the waterproof poncho and pour off in a morale-disrupting fashion whenever one end was let down. In addition hand grenades and belted MG ammunition were scarce. Orders went out to conserve these as much as possible.³⁰

During the day, recoilless rifles fired on Hill 980 and reported several direct hits on enemy bunkers. That day, too, the OP-CP displaced forward to near the position of the 81mm mortar group (about where Fox Company’s CP had been the morning of the 17th), while the 81s were firing. Thereafter, the OP group moved to Easy Company’s positions. Major Averill and the 2/5 CO, LtCol Stiff made their way up 812 and inspected the positions of Easy and Fox.³¹

Gerald P. Averill later described his experiences on September 18, 19 and 20, 1951, on Hill 812:

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

On the Morning of the 19th, [18th according to 2/5 Historical Diary] the colonel decided to leave the “D” Company area, go up to Hill 812 for a look-see, and establish a command post closer to the lines. Going up that valley trail was a hard thing for me. Blood from the “F” Company dead and wounded was everywhere. Too much of it, too many people gone south again, too many off on the journey from which there is no return. . . .

The main ridge line was a dreary sight. Colors of dark brown and gray, the foliage down off the crest frayed and torn, the main battle position pulverized, a heavy mist or a light rain covering the entire hilltop. The North Korean snipers opened up on us at once. . . . The gunners of the 76mm mountain guns gave us a demonstration. Believe me, until you have heard one of their projectiles sing, you don’t fully appreciate music. Extremely high velocity, splitting the air with a wicked snap, as accurate as rifle fire and packing a hell of a lot more wallop. . .

³²

The colonel and Averill made it to the men on 812, and Averill noticed they were spooked. He had been with the battalion longer than any other officer, “had humped the hills longer, been shot at more consistently, had shared the long days and the longer nights with these people. This had been their hardest fight. It was my job to stay, to look after them the best way I could.” So he asked the colonel if he could stay on with the men on Hill 812 and received permission.³³

The official reason as recorded by the 2/5 Historical Diary is less dramatic. “The reason for the displacement and the splitting of the command group was the impossible laying and maintaining of telephone wire to the line companies and the exposed position of Fox and Easy Companies to enemy fire. The Battalion Commander wanted to maintain constant communications with all units and at the same time was unwilling to have the group ‘pinned down’ and useless when needed most of all during a firefight or an attack.”³⁴

Averill went on:

³² Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 270-71.

³³ *Ibid.*, 271.

³⁴ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 55-56.

That afternoon we cut trees, revetted, roofed, and sandbagged a bunker just down from the intersection of the north-south, east-west ridge lines, just a few steps from the ridge line leading to The Rock, and a few more to the junction of the "E" and "F" Companies' lines. . . . By night fall we had a land line back to battalion and the radio was properly netted. . . .³⁵

He later sent back a message to the Battalion CO. "This place is pretty well bracketed. They are dropping 120's [120mm mortar rounds] all over the area, have caused 16 casualties this afternoon. This will be a daily occurrence if conditions remain same. 3rd platoon down to 17 men with machine guns included." But positions *would* remain the same for most of the rest of the month, and for any other unit stationed on 812 until 1953 when the communists regained it. "The Regimental S-3 [not Averill, he was the battalion S-3] intimated in a talk with Lieutenant Colonel Stiff that the 2nd Battalion would remain on the present line for a considerable time. . . ."³⁶

Most think of the position of rifleman as being the most dangerous or the one where one would see the most combat. But the less "glamorous" job of wire-laying was a dangerous one as well. That day wiremen from 2/5 were stringing wire between the companies when a mortar round hit nearby and wounded three out of the four Marines as well as two nearby Korean laborers. At other times wiremen had found booby-traps like grenades on a wire when they were out running it through their fingers trying to locate a break. And furthermore, when one takes in to account that breaks were often caused by shelling and that a wireman had to check his wire even under the heaviest incoming, he realizes that it was about as dangerous a job as a man could have in Korea.³⁷

³⁵ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 271-72.

³⁶ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 55-56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56, 60.

There were yet more difficulties on Hill 812, these caused by the ground itself. "The ground in the vicinity was very rocky and difficult to work with, and the limited number of entrenching tools available further hampered digging." "Many casualties that might have been avoided with better cover and deeper holes," were the result.³⁸

Later on the Battalion CO communicated with the Regimental CO. LtCol Stiff told Col Weede that there was no room on the ridge to bring Dog Company up, too. Even if the Marines had had more of their units on hand, the difficult terrain precluded their employment.³⁹

At 1725 the NKPA launched a probing attack on Easy Company's left flank near the Rock. After this, the outpost was withdrawn in a ways for the night so as not have the line too extended near the probable route of enemy attack, along the ridgeline from 980 to 812.⁴⁰

That afternoon a helicopter evacuating wounded near 812 was taken under artillery fire. Though unharmed, the "higher-ups" decided to have the helicopters only pick up wounded from a forward aid station further away from enemy fire. (This was probably because the Marines were doing a great many tactical experiments with helicopters at the time and to lose one to enemy fire might stain the progress of such experiments in certain circles.) Fifteen trips were made to the new aid station location with two casualties lifted out per trip that day. "All stretcher patients except three concussion cases were evacuated this evening"⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

Seven POWs were taken by 2/5 alone during the day. These reported that their unit had received 43 KIA and 54 WIA in the previous days. One NKPA who was wounded was ordered to take his pants down by a corpsman in order to see the wound. The man was reluctant. The corpsman, weary and impatient, pulled them off for him and to the humor of the Marines revealed the man to be wearing “the brightest green long-handled skivvies this side of Ireland.”⁴²

Orders came down to continue to consolidate positions and patrol. The 5th Marines, furthermore, was to assume responsibility for the 1st Marines zone. Emphasis was to be on supporting arms in destroying any enemy encountered.⁴³

The night was relatively quiet, though Marines on watch could hear the enemy laying mines and moving about. “Despite the bombardments and the rain, most Marines on the lines who had been able to keep dry got their best night’s sleep since the 15th.”⁴⁴

Among 2/5 alone, the casualties were: 12 KIA and 67 WIA. Losses for the whole division were: 16 KIA and 93 WIA for the U. S. Marines, and 5 WIA for the KMCs. For the enemy, they were: 50 KIA, 55 WIA, both estimated, and 9 POWs.⁴⁵

Day Nine: September 19 The Rock

Seven Hundred yards west from Hill 812 on the ridge leading to 980, a conspicuous protrusion of granite stood silhouetted against the September sky. This landmark was known among the Marines as “the Rock.” It was a “very distinctive Gothic-spire-like granite projection rising approximately twenty-five feet into the air,

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; 1st Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 22-23.

seeming out of place in this region of rounded, green ridges and wooded knobs. . . . [It] is approximately seventy-five feet across, lightly fringed with vegetation, and from its northern side an overgrown rocky slope leads down to the valley of the Soyang-Gang. It appears weird and forbidding, particularly after dark, and effectively obscures from sight a considerable area to the west.” The Marines had outposts on the top of the hill where the Rock stood and to its east. Just to the west, however, was NKPA “Injun country,” or “goonie land.” The Marines had to dig in on the northern slope of the ridge between the Rock and Hill 812, the southern slope was untenable due to enemy observation and fire.⁴⁶

Just east of The Rock were usable North Korean positions, including a bunker. A platoon from “E” Company out posted the ridge from these positions and furnished a fire team for The Rock. The remainder of “E” Company existed during the daylight hours on the east slope of the north-south ridge line. At night they moved into fighting holes on the western slope. “F” Company linked up with “E” Company at the northern tip of the 812 complex and defended to the north along the ridge line running east toward Hills 673 and 749.⁴⁷

Marines were in short supply of fortification material, too, such as sand bags, barbed wire, and mines. It was a sticky problem facing 2/5 of how to get its companies much needed supplies. Helicopters again provided the solution. Though request for helicopter resupply was only sent at 1100 that morning, the Marines by evening had received 12,180 pounds of supplies from sixteen flights within a single hour in Operation Windmill II. The helicopter proved to be a significant boon to the 1st Mar Div in the mountainous terrain far from the sea.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 49; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 197; 1st Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 23. This formation would also be known as “Luke the Gook’s Castle.”

⁴⁷ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 269.

⁴⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 197; 1st Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 23.

This day, too, saw 2/5 receiving the most casualties. In addition, 1/5 was released from reserve when it was relieved by elements of 2/1, and it marched to support 2/5 by setting up on the same ridge, to the right of 812. The Marines of 1/5 held a long front of two miles, running east along the ridgetop to the vicinity of the river. Marines of 3/5 deployed on the left to block the ridgeline between 812 and 751 as an enemy counterattack would probably utilize that approach. However, much of 3/5 was still in the same positions it had been in on September 16. "This left us [Easy and Fox Companies 2/5] with our left flank dangling just down off the southern slope of Hill 812, with the valley wide open to the North Koreans should they decide to use it for an end run in the darkness."⁴⁹

The 1st Battalion 1st Marines moved south about 1.5 miles after being relieved by the 5th Marines. This battalion and 3/1 were ordered to relieve the 8th ROK Division to the east (Hill 854). The other battalion of the 1st Marines, 2/1, moved south and became division reserve.⁵⁰

No "large" actions were had that day, but casualties continued to be had from the long range fire of Hills 980 and 1052. However, the day was not uneventful. The day began with the repulse by artillery of an enemy infiltration about 0500. Thereafter, at 0810, reinforced patrols (one rifle and machine gun squad each) stepped out from Easy and Fox to explore the finger ridges to the north of 812 leading towards the portion of the Soyang-gang hemming the area on the north. Another patrol departed from Dog Company at 0915 to patrol the valley at Dog's right. No patrol met enemy resistance, but a supply train of men was pinned down by enemy fire from 1052 and 980 when it

⁴⁹ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 270; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 197; 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 23.

⁵⁰ 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 23.

made a wrong turn. One combat correspondent with a battalion and Fox Company radioman, along with two Koreans carrying the radios, too, became lost. Suddenly, twenty enemy soldiers who had been moving to surround them opened fire. The Marines dispersed and all managed to escape to safety.⁵¹

One other similar incident occurred, but again ended with the Marines finding safety. "Thus ended the last of the day's series of lost Marine incidents; fortunately, too, without any damage except to the self-confidence of the individuals involved."⁵²

The companies of 2/5 were thinned by casualties. Easy reported its strength this day as 6 officers and 133 enlisted; Fox, 5 officers, 142 enlisted. (A Marine Rifle Company at full strength numbered 228.) Harassing artillery fire continued throughout the day with at least five rounds per hour hitting on 812. One airstrike was brought in, but could not be executed because radios were out. Marine FOs (forward observers) continued to call in artillery, and after one deluge of proximity-fused HE (high explosive) shells, one reported seeing two enemy "flying through the air."⁵³

Just at dusk, two batteries of 4.5 inch rockets cut loose a few "ripples." These were a weapon about as loud as any ever devised and the rain of rockets pounded a large portion of 1052 with a heavy volume of HE, boosting Marine morale with accompanying cheers. There were 144 rounds in a ripple of rockets. POWs called them "the automatic mortars." The roads became impassable to trucks at this point. "All evacuations after

⁵¹ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 62.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 62, 63; United States Marine Corps, "Reference Data: Amphibious Operations, NAVMC 1048" (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1951): 1-6, copy in my possession.

noon this date were by air . . .” or by foot. Some lucky Marines got to have heat tablets to warm their chow.⁵⁴

When reports were had of a possible assembling of enemy for counterattack in the area of 3/5, 2/5 Marines took note of their “own overextended lines and the limited route of withdrawal . . . [and] a provisional platoon was organized under the H&S Company Commander, from that company.”⁵⁵

The incoming continued throughout the night, not all of it missing the flesh it was seeking. Several casualties were incurred and one KIA was had “from concussion.” Thereafter, “Easy Company Marines . . . reported seeing a large convoy of trucks with headlights burning, far off in the distance up the valley, suggesting reinforcements for the enemy. Attempts to secure a night airstrike were unavailing, [JOC rarely allowed airplanes away from interdiction for ‘night heckling,’ even more rarely than for daylight CAS] and the enemy were believed out of range for any but 155mm rifles.”⁵⁶

On a lighter note, the password for 2/5 that night was “Dumb Blonde.” One Marine, when challenged by a sentry, forgot it and stammered “Gee I-I’ve forgotten it, but it’s something about Dagmar!” The result was, “Needless to say, he was allowed to pass on!”⁵⁷

The enemy was never far away, however. An observation plane spotted NKPA dug in “as close as seventy-five yards . . . well camouflaged, dressed in green, quilted uniforms. . . .”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Third Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” 7; “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 65.

⁵⁵ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 65.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Marine losses were: 5 KIA, 58 WIA, and 5 KMCs were WIA. Enemy losses were: 100 counted KIA, 50 estimated KIA, 43 estimated KIA, and 15 POWs.⁵⁹

Day Ten: September 20
The Rock

The night of September 19-20 was far from one of quiet repose and relaxation. At 0315, the NKPA tried to seize Hill 812. The attack came after an intense barrage of enemy supporting arms, particularly hitting heavy on Easy-1. "This fire was at first thought to be a regular bombardment, but as the shells continued falling at a constant rate, the Marines assumed that a counterattack was imminent. One observer described the half hour bombardment as 'the most intense' he had yet experienced in this short operation." It included both 120mm mortars and 76mm artillery, but it was also supplemented with 75mm recoilless rifle fire from less than 700 yards off, a more than effective range for this weapon. The Marines began laying on their own 81mm mortars ahead of their lines. At 0230, the barrage "lifted and moved eastward." Then at least a company of NKPA boiled across the ridge on the slope north of the Rock hurling grenades and spraying bullets from their burp guns. The soldiers were right on the heels of the walking mortar barrage; they had circled the Rock and poured into the attack before Marine 4.2 inch mortars had any chance of going to work. (See Map # 36) (This larger mortar could only be used safely a fair distance from friendly lines since the shells produced such a wallop, but the enemy quickly closed to within that distance.)⁶⁰ (See Photo #6)

⁵⁹ 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 23.

⁶⁰ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 67-68.

One squad of Easy-1 was surrounded before it could blink. The platoon radioed for more supporting fire, but Averill told them to remember their rifles and MGs and fight back with their own organic weapons. Men in a firefight could easily become too dependent on supporting fire and forget their own weapons, a frequent occurrence throughout the stalemate phase of Korea.⁶¹

The platoon tried to counterattack, but the enemy was too strong. The “small counterattack succeeded in joining the platoon into a single body and thus probably prevented fatal confusion.” Lt. Matas led at the head of his platoon in this assault “into the middle of the swarming enemy . . .” but was soon felled by a chunk of grenade shrapnel to his neck, severely wounding him. This action confused and delayed the enemy enough that the rest of the thin line of Marines on 812 could brace to “repel boarders.”⁶²

One squad leader with Easy-1, Sergeant Weiss (no first name supplied), “took charge of the two remaining squads,” and managed to get Lt. Matas to safety as well as cover the platoon’s withdrawal, wounded included. “The enemy continued to press forward fiercely, screaming and shouting to buoy up their spirits (and possibly to help maintain contact with one another as they attempted to strike terror into the hearts of the defending Marines).” The platoon had to fall back to the left flank of Hill 812 where the 3rd Platoon was. “. . . it was known that any sizeable counterattack would breach [the platoon’s line] and this withdrawal did not come as a surprise.” This platoon had but

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶² *Ibid.*

30 men: 2 squads and an MG squad; (the 3rd Platoon only 16 men and 5 machine gunners—barely a single squad; 2nd Platoon 34 men and a MG section.)⁶³

“The momentum of the enemy attack was only slightly diminished by the terrific volume of artillery and mortar fire . . .” sent in by U. S. supporting arms. Between 0240 and 0450 over 1,600 rounds of friendly artillery were delivered on enemy positions. The 81mm mortars fired 606 rounds before 0700 from their 6 tubes. “The 81mm radio net [was] . . . buzzing” with “constant” activity. “Send it Easy. Roger Easy. On the way, Easy. Again Easy. Roger. Same again. Roger.” The laborers and Marines assigned to keep the mortars supplied with ammunition had to improvise. They used “any conceivable type of carrier for mortar shells” from ammo bags, their own pockets, packboards, knapsacks, to haversacks. Some Koreans even tied their bundles with primer cord. When dawn revealed this, the cord was replaced with rope. That could have been one explosive accident.⁶⁴

Easy Company received heavy fire along its front lines from positions abandoned by Easy-1. The NKPA had set up two MGs in a deserted bunker on a prominent knob (See Map # 37), and poured plunging fire from this elevated point directly into Marine positions. The enemy kept up the attack with heavy use of small arms and grenades against Easy-1 and Easy-3. A squad from the 2nd Platoon was quickly dispatched to reinforce them. Averill saw that the defense was at a critical moment. He moved about the area, talking to the troops, letting himself be seen, and organizing the men.⁶⁵

Again, Gerald P. Averill:

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 67-68; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 197; 1st Mar Div “Historical Diary”, September 1951, 24.

⁶⁴ “Historical Diary,” Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 68-69.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

The average trooper, enlisted or commissioned, wants to see rank roaming around when things turn hot. *That* is what rank gets paid for. . . . Someone has to be there to talk it up, to do the coaching, to be responsible for the team. If you stand with troopers in a firefight, they will put on one hell of a show. If you crawl into your foxhole and pull it on top of you, why shouldn't they do the same? There was far too much rank in the foxholes that night.⁶⁶

Corporal Nolen (no first name supplied) was an FO for the 3rd Section of the 81mm mortar platoon and was up with Easy Company to direct the fires. He was calling in "previously registered defensive mortar fires, when he saw that greater accuracy and closer fires would . . ." be beneficial. He crawled out on the ridge outside the lines with his radio operator, Corporal Martin, where all the hell was falling and mines were everywhere, and began to shout coordinates and fire corrections to Martin, who relayed the information over the radio.⁶⁷

The Marines counterattacked again at half an hour before standard reveille time (0500). Easy Company provided a holding force, hitting the enemy in the front, while the "orphan" 2nd platoon from Fox Company circled and struck the enemy from the flank in a crushing attack by grenades and machine guns with complete surprise. The NKPA fled, and 60 enemy dead were counted in its wake.⁶⁸

Averill's account was less sympathetic to the actions of Weiss to evacuate Lt.

Matas:

About 0200 the next morning the sky fell in. Like a cloudburst, 120mm mortar shells came down around us, saturating the whole defensive complex. The hills trembled, shuddered, the roar of the explosions unbroken, deafening, the deadly whir-rr-rrr of the cast iron shell fragments like the whine of giant bees. . . . The land line was hit. We sent a message by radio to inform the battalion of our situation, although there should have been little doubt in their minds.

⁶⁶ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 273.

⁶⁷ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 69-70.

⁶⁸ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 197-98; 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 24.

We suffered through thirty minutes of shelling before the North Korean gunners shut it off and the enemy infantry made its play around the north side of The Rock. An attack in company strength—the main body moving against the “E” Company Platoon on the east-west ridge line leading into Hill 812, a separate force advancing its members cautiously, one by one, slipping far below the Marine fighting holes, silently stealing their way into position to attack the northern tip of Hill 812 at the junction of the two rifle companies.

Out around The Rock, the Marines and the North Korean were in a real cat fight, tearing each other to pieces. The Marines were holding, counterattacking in the darkness, trying to eject the enemy. In close combat the platoon leader was badly wounded. Attempts to evacuate him destroyed the cohesion of the defense. False priorities. They got him out, but lost the position. The North Korean quickly manned their old strong points and started raking the north-south ridge line with automatic-weapons fire, pinning Marines low in their fighting holes.⁶⁹

Averill then described some behavior that showed Marines do not always live up to Marine Corps standards when in combat:

Throughout all this action the company commanders and platoon leaders within the main battle position had been conspicuous by their absence along the line. Here and there troopers were slipping out of the forward positions, ducking back behind the hill. Ramsdell and I turned three of them back with bayonet and .45. Something positive had to happen or the North Koreans just might knock us off that hard-won hill.⁷⁰

So Averill, a Major, called back to battalion during a lull and asked the colonel if he could have operational control of the two companies. Permission was granted. He also called in what supporting requirements he would need. It was, “no real sweat, for the whole hill mass and the connecting ridges had been shot-in during the initial attack. It just would amount to calling for previously coded concentrations when the time came, but with precise timing.”⁷¹

It was good Averill was there:

The troopers were getting spooky. They had reason to be. It was a sticky, uncoordinated, confused situation. A couple of A-4 light machine guns started to

⁶⁹ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 271-72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

rattle with no targets in sight—a sure sign of increasing nervousness. Just tickle that trigger to bolster your confidence. I had to give one of the gunners a smart rap on the helmet with my .45 to get him to knock off firing. He looked back over his shoulder, saw who it was, and gave me a grin of embarrassment. . . .⁷²

Soon, the North Koreans were attacking again. Averill called in the supporting fires.

Rapid booms in the distance, the swish and swoosh of incoming 105mm howitzer shells, the sound of the 4.2-in. mortars firing at regiment, the steady thumping of the 81mms kicking out of the tubes in the valley behind us. The east-west ridge line blossomed into a solid sheet of red, crimson, orange, yellow, and blinding white. Enemy soldiers could be seen darting to the rear, sprinting forward, leaping from the ridge line. That fire was *close*—the kind you read about in the manuals but seldom see, the kind you dream about when you are about to play out your last card. Other concentrations came down on Hills 980 and 1052, a thousand meters of pulsating flame reaching from Hill 812 to the peak of 1052. Now the eight-inch guns added their power, splitting rocks, tearing out chunks of earth, disintegrating trees, throwing bits of enemy soldiers into the air. The barrage moved west, and the east again—searching, searching.⁷³

“About 0330, the enemy mortar fire that had been pummeling the nose of Hill 812, moved back onto Easy Company positions and reached its crescendo.” Easy’s CO was worried the enemy would head down the trail and hit the 81mm mortar positions as well as keep pushing his main attack. The “remaining squad” of Easy-2 was given the job of heading to a finger ridge of 812 branching towards the south as flank security so enemy could not slip past and attack the mortars. Averill radioed the Battalion CO at 0445, “I’m going to counterattack with Fox.” He also had a message sent to 3/5 asking it to “neutralize” 1052 with fire. Simultaneously, another message requested that an OY plane go up and observe enemy artillery flashes and try to direct some counterbattery in on them.⁷⁴

⁷² *Ibid.*, 273.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 273-74.

⁷⁴ Second Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 70.

The Battalion CO then called Regiment for permission to commit Dog Company if necessary. Dog was regimental reserve and could not be used without regimental permission. This permission was given. Dog was alerted for possible commitment.⁷⁵

Fox-2 was moved at 0500 to a forward post on the left flank of 812. Lt. Anderson (no first name supplied) commanded Fox-3 and elements of Fox-2. He then took over Fox-1 as well and reorganized it to effectively meet attacks.⁷⁶

At 0400 there was a lull of about a half hour, then “the enemy began to intensify his fire and the Marines braced themselves for a final assault.” The Easy Company 60mm mortars kept their tubes hot punching out rounds into the enemy, 167 total expended. The radios to the heavier mortars, the 81s and four deuces, went out at this point so the 60s had to fill the gap. By 0445 the main body of the NKPA assault was within 75 meters of the center knoll of the 812 ridge line, hurling many grenades and riddling Marine lines with burp gun bursts. After fifteen minutes of this, the enemy closed on Easy-1 and Easy-3 and “assaulted with a veritable shower of hand grenades’ that wreaked havoc on the friendly positions and demoralized certain persons, already shaken up by three days bombardment, within the defensive area.”⁷⁷

Most of the Marines had had to wait for the attack in reverse slope bunkers (these were where the enemy had lived and slept), not having had a chance to prepare any on the forward slope because of enemy incoming and such bunkers were not the best for repelling an assault. “The main assault came in the center of the hill and under cover of intense grenade barrage, managed to close with Marines in the center positions. Marines fought bitterly until they were overcome by superior numbers, then those who

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

were wounded drew back. Some personnel, new in combat and inexperienced, upon being wounded, left their original positions and may have participated in a general panic, had not [Averill] and others, at great personal risk to themselves, directed the reorganization of the units.”⁷⁸

The enemy could sense the weakening and redoubled his efforts. “Fortunately, however, the flanks of this line had not been overcome by the enemy, and about a dozen Marines remained in bunkers on either side of the dissolved center.” These Marines rushed towards the center in the dark, firing into North Korean forms, and then to clench with enemy soldiers and kill them by feel when they had not the time to reload afterward. Pistols were handy here, and bayonets. Sometimes rocks, a shovel, whatever else was at hand. Grenade detonations were as common as flowers in a meadow.⁷⁹

The names of those who turned tail are not known and it is well they sleep anonymous through the ages. But the names of those who rose to the occasion with duty and courage should never be forgotten.

PFC Bishop (no first name supplied), was in charge of guarding his machine gun’s flank during the maelstrom. He fought off two enemy with his BAR when the gun went silent, buying time to restore the automatic weapon to the fray. Then the BAR ran dry. His ammo belt of six magazine pouches, each capable of holding two twenty-round magazines, and which normally creased his shoulders where the suspenders hung with the weight, was light with none left. Bishop then flung grenades into the rushing foe, and

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

swept up a carbine with which he peppered enemy forms until the second wave had faded.⁸⁰

Corporal Smith (no first name supplied) found himself in “the face of intense enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire” when a gunner on one of the MGs had been wounded. NKPA soldiers were only a few yards away, blistering the area with burp gun slugs in the rapid, almost gushing burst that characterized these weapons, BBBRRRRRRRAAAAPPP. Some of these foes were in a small defilade right in front of Smith’s MG position. He leapt to his feet with the MG cradled in his arms in the manner of John Basilone and Mitchell Paige who had earned the MOH in the Pacific using the same technique, and ripped a belted burst of .30 caliber tracer and full metal jacket bullets into the defilade, riddling two enemy with bullets and wounding others. A NKPA who had no ammunition left, leapt up and shot Smith in the face with a signal pistol. The flare burned him, but he ignored the pain to drill the NKPA with high velocity MG bullets.⁸¹

Corporal Farrell (no first name supplied) was on the right flank of the 3rd Platoon when the center dissolved. He recognized the danger and dashed through the storm of enemy grenade fragments towards the center, hurling his own grenades to drive back the attackers. Bodies fell, filled with splintered steel, smoking in the light of gun fire and HE flashes.⁸²

PFC Carr (no first name supplied), saw the gunner and assistant gunner felled on his MG. He, with another Marine, immediately took over the “light thirty” and maintained the stream of fire it had given the attackers. Enemy crept to only a few yards off, under

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 72.

cover of burp gun and rifle fire. They hunkered down underneath his position on the slope and began to lob grenades into the MG pit. Carr stayed with the gun regardless, and kept up a relentless fire with his carbine, only pausing to reload or throw a grenade of his own.⁸³

One of the bunkers the Marines held had taken grenades through its apertures. Every Marine in it was a casualty, wounded and bleeding badly. One of them, Corporal Mac Lain, held a Silver Star from the Yangu operation earlier that year. He was unable to move, his wounds were so bad, and he was quickly bleeding to death. Yet the Marines around him refused to leave him to death. They stayed and defended him from the enemy attempts to occupy the bunker until a corpsman managed to crawl through the exploding night and give him blood plasma. "Two of the overrun bunkers were later found to have received direct hits by several enemy grenades, most of which were powerful Soviet offensive-type fragmentation, similar to our own."⁸⁴

At this time, Fox-2 was committed "to reinforcement of the battle position and commenced the delivery of a hail of grenades, automatic and small arms fire on the enemy from positions on the ridge. The remainder of [Easy-2], (Lieutenant Hinson) moved to the left, over to the center of Hill 812, to reinforce and back up the line. The shock and surprise effect of this added fire made it obvious to the enemy that our positions were still strong, but though the defenders were now better organized, the issue still remained in doubt. The fact that the flanks on 812 held against repeated

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

assaults of determined enemy undoubtedly saved a major breakthrough from menacing the front at this point.”⁸⁵

The dawn soon lighted the sky and enemy grenadiers had infiltrated to right under the Marine fighting positions, trying to take the right flank of the two companies. Marines tossed grenades just outside their holes down onto the enemy on the slope. After this attack was beaten back, enemy poured down the ridge from the Rock. Averill, however, had made ready a standby platoon for just such an occasion. “They stood to the rear of the main bunker in a line of skirmishers—bayonets fixed, weapons and grenades ready—just down from the bunker, out of sight. . . . Psyched-up, confidence bolstered by the fact that the Marines had given ground, the enemy swooped over the bunkers, to be met at point-blank range by a fusillade of grenades, small arms, and automatic-weapons fire—fire so heavy that it stopped the North Koreans, turned them, and sent them flying back along the ridge line and into the western bunkers.” Just then a supply train of ammo arrived ““seeming like a prayer answered,’ said the Fox Company Commander.”⁸⁶

One bunker was still in enemy hands. A 3.5 inch rocket team had moved to engage it at 0420, 250 yards off, but the darkness was too much and the team had to wait until dawn to effectively be able to aim. As dawn crept closer, so too did the end of this bunker, and as soon as there was light, with MGs firing streams into the embrasures to suppress the combatants inside while the rocket team worked. The back-

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 274-75; Second Battalion, 5th Marines, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 72-73.

blast of the launcher scorched the earth and a few well-placed rockets decimated the position.⁸⁷

Averill's counterattack force then stepped out after them, a squad in-column on point. This was the 3rd Squad of Fox Company commanded by Sergeant Covella (no first name supplied) and reinforced with a machine gun section. The rest of the platoon provided a base of fire. The time was 0545. "So exuberant and buoyant was Major Averill, as he rushed from squad to squad all along the line, that his good humor became contagious and when the troops moved out, they advanced in good spirits, a far-cry from the near panic of some an hour earlier." His words were, "Roll 'em, boy! Roll 'em!" Covella "directed his squad through a hail of grenades and automatic fire. Marines felled the fleeing enemy and when full daylight came, the enemy was nowhere to be seen. Under covering fire from bazookas and MGs, this squad cleared the rest of the ridge 100 yards past the Rock by 0630. However, no enemy was encountered in that area, and the elements of Fox pulled back into defensive positions."⁸⁸

"Some North Korean troops remained momentarily in reverse slope bunker and foxhole positions [near the center of the line], and threw poorly aimed grenades at the advancing Marines, but these were ineffective. As it was becoming light, the artillery was shifted from a concentration on 'the Rock' and preceded 3rd Squad by a few hundred meters. At approximately 0520, a flare was observed above the trail to the west and a bugle call sounded, obviously the signal for the enemy to retreat. So intensive was friendly artillery fire pounding the narrow ridgeline, that the enemy was unable to

⁸⁷ Second Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 73.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 73; Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 275.

follow his original route of attack (around 'The Rock') and was believed to have descended the slopes on both sides. . . ."⁸⁹

Hill 812 "stood bleak and bare, its rocky sides beaten to a brown powder by high explosives, the northern slopes littered with enemy dead." "By 0645, all former positions had been retaken and one half hour later this message was dispatched by radio to the Battalion Commanding Officer from the S-3 [Averill]: 'All ground lost has been regained. Patrols now one hundred yards to the front.'" The 2/5 Marines had taken 11 POWs, counted 30 enemy KIA, and estimated an additional 20 KIA and 15 wounded had been sustained by the NKPA's in this attack. "These estimates were said by Easy and Fox Company officers to be conservative, as most believed the better part of an enemy company destroyed." An enemy POW said that his battalion was down to 240 men and that the previous night's attack had been with thirty men, whereas Fox's CO estimated at least 100 enemy involved, but "it was assumed that what he [the POW] stated was, rather, the original plan, not what actually happened. . . ." The Marines of 2/5 lost 2 KIA and 31 WIA that day. One of each of the two KIA was in Easy and Fox respectively. Easy had 21 WIA, Fox 3, Weapons Company 3, H&S Company 2, Dog Company 2. Twelve of the WIA were not evacuated but chose to remain on the line, or did not have ambulatory wounds.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Second Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 73.

⁹⁰ Maj Gerald P. Averill, "Final Objective," 16; Second Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 73-74, 76, 77.

The hill was now UN territory and would remain so until Communists wrested it from the ROK 12th Division in June 1953. Averill would receive the Silver Star.⁹¹ (See Map # 39)

Dog Company then passed through the Fox CP on its way to relieve the worn remnants of Fox and Easy. "At least one platoon of Dog Company reached the Fox CP, where it was held up, before Fox-2's counterattack had finished mopping up. The rest of Dog Company followed closely; the company's movement on sudden orders and in darkness was most expeditious."⁹²

One last hill remained to be taken far to the east to complete the Marine mission of establishing the new Minnesota Line (the Hays Line with terrain gained along Kanmubong Ridge added). Hill 854 was held by the 8th ROK Division, but the enemy was still entrenched along it and resisting. The enemy was elements of the 45th Regiment, 15th NKPA Division. The 1st Marines was ordered to take the hill by force if not already secured by the 8th ROK Division. (See Phot # 7) The ROKS were reportedly on the crest, but over 2000 yards of the hill were still enemy. The Marines moved to a position near the hill and began the attack late in the day (1730) after CAS failed to materialize. It bogged down almost immediately because the objective was very strongly held by about 500 enemy in bunkers. Guides from the 8th ROK Division were on hand to get the Marines through the mines and to the positions the Marines were to occupy, but the guides seemed incompetent to the Marines. They "bugged out" when enemy incoming was received and were not seen again. The Marines of 3/1 took some casualties (1 KIA and 1 WIA) from mines, many of them laid by ROKs, on the slopes.

⁹¹ Paul M. Edwards, *The Hill Wars of the Korean Conflict* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006): 111.

⁹² Second Battalion, 5th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 74.

The advance was slow and hard fought with How Company in the lead. Enemy fire was intense and darkness imminent, so 3/1 consolidated for the night at 1900 having only gained 50 yards and lost 7 KIA and 24 WIA in How Company alone.⁹³ (See Map # 38)

Total casualties for the 20th for the whole division were 12 KIA and 68 WIA.⁹⁴

On 21 September, 3/1 moved again to take Hill 854. Prisoners reported that over 500 enemy with orders to defend to the death held the 2,000 meters of ridgeline, mostly in reverse slope positions well stocked with ample ammunition. Artillery had a very tough time bringing fire on this reverse slope. "Air support was requested to be on station at 0700 but did not arrive." Once again, the Marines found themselves advancing up a steep slope strewn with mines through a rain of steel from artillery and mortars and fiery green tracers from machine guns. This attack was delayed until almost 1300 in a wait for CAS because the enemy defense was stalwart. However, JOC called 1st Mar Div and reported that there would be no more air that day, though one strike was eventually executed. The enemy's mutually supporting positions on Hill 854 were reported as being better constructed than any yet encountered. The Marines finally broke the NKPA back at 1650 when two key bunkers were demolished. The hill was reported secured at 1745. The losses this day were 2 KIA and 31 WIA.⁹⁵

⁹³ Third Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7; 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4, 20; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 3. See chapter on Close Air Support.

⁹⁴ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 31.

⁹⁵ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5, 20-21; Third Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 7; 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 24. See chapter on Close Air Support.

The Marines of 3/1 had lost 9 KIA and 55 WIA total to take Hill 854. Enemy casualties were: 159 counted KIA, 150 estimated KIA, 225 estimated WIA, and 29 POWs.⁹⁶

Marine losses over the last three days amounted to 33 KIA and 235 WIA. Most were in the 5th Marines, particularly 2/5. The enemy's total losses for the same three days were 265 counted KIA, 972 estimated KIA (with the 265 included), and 113 prisoners were taken.⁹⁷ As to the estimates, the North Koreans were known to always take their dead whenever possible so it is not improbable that the estimates, though usually too high, were not without some merit.⁹⁸

The "battle" was officially over at this point since no new objectives or attacks were made by the Marines, but no one told the NKPA. They continued to probe and prod and infiltrate, inflicting over 200 more casualties by month's end.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary", September 1951, 25; Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 206; Third Battalion, 1st Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 8.

⁹⁷ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 198.

⁹⁸ "Historical Diary," Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, 54.

⁹⁹ 1st Mar Div "Historical Diary," September 1951, 31.

CHAPTER 11

CLOSE AIR SUPPORT

I am prepared to reaffirm my prior conviction that the close air support furnished my Division during the heavy fighting of 10-22 September was not adequate and that casualties resulted directly from the deficiency. Adequacy of air support in this case, I view as extending not to the number of sorties alone, but to the other important matters of timeliness of sorties, adequacy of armament and quality of performance. I likewise confirm my stated preference that Marines on the ground be supported by Marine aircraft – solely because of the more effective coordination attainable as a result of our extended and detailed training together. I do not view such an arrangement as a matter of meeting special requirements – of which this Division has none – but rather as a means of achieving greater efficiency, and thus to further the common effort.

--MajGen Gerald C. Thomas

The Marine concept of Close Air Support and the controversy between the Navy/Marine Corps and the Army/Air Force (AF) over the CAS system used by EUSAK in Korea, played a significant role in the events surrounding the battle in September, 1951. The Marine Corps had a different idea of how CAS should be conducted than the AF, and an understanding of the Marine concept for CAS and how it differs from the AF way is necessary to understand this controversy and the importance this battle had in it.

Throughout the Corps's time as expeditionary or amphibious troops it was a combined arms force, so that by the time of Korea it was an integrated spearhead consisting of infantry, artillery, armor, and air components organized according to the Air-Ground Team concept. But while the Corps was a combined arms branch, the tip of its spear had, since the early nineteenth century, been its infantry.

Marines saw this system as unique to themselves, and throughout the Korean War, aside from U. S. X Corps, they were right. The Marine Corps and the Navy, as opposed to the Army and the Air Force, “had different views on the relative contribution to ground operations of interdiction strikes and close air-support missions, views that embodied substantial differences in doctrine, organization, training, equipment, and tactical techniques.”¹

These differences caused great interservice friction during the Korean War.

The basic concept for the Marine Corps-Navy doctrine and technique for tactical air operations in support of ground forces is that the air operations are closely integrated with and a primary supporting arm for ground force operations in the assault and seizure of physical objectives. The plans for supporting air operations are determined in large measure by the requirements of the ground forces being supported. This is particularly true of the plans for close air support. The assistance rendered by air is not only general, but is also direct; it is made reliably available and is *closely integrated with fire and maneuver of the ground forces*. The primary measure for the effectiveness of tactical air support is the amount of direct assistance provided to the ground force in executing its scheme of maneuver and seizing its objective. All air-ground operations are controlled by a single commander.²

In other words, air was to support infantry and not the reverse. Unlike some of the other services and other military forces in the world, the Marine Corps did not see infantry as a supporting arm. It was the striking arm and the backbone of the Corps. The

¹ Allen R. Millett, “Chapter Eight: Korea, 1950-1953,” in Benjamin Franklin Cooling ed., *Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force, 1990): 345; “1MarDiv ‘Report of CAS,” Letter of CG (commanding general) 1MarDiv, MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, to CG Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, LtGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, dated 25 August 1951, (Alfred M. Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA: Archives and Special Collections, Marine Corps Historical Center Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Korean War document CD collection, 1973): CD #15 of 25. General Almond tried to adopt this system for all of X Corps, but once that corps became part of Eighth Army, the Air Force system was forced on everybody despite Almond’s and other Army officers’ protests. The Marine Corps, too, was forced to route all CAS requests through the Air Force JOC. An Army study on CAS concluded that the “1MarDiv has achieved higher effectiveness in the tactical employment of air support than has any other unit in Korea . . . the Marines’ success is due to their organization, system and training.”

² U. S. Marine Corps, “Marine Corps Board Study: Evaluation of the Influence Of Marine Corps Forces on the Course of the Korean War, Vol. 1,” (Quantico, VA: Alfred M. Gray Research Center Archives): IV-B-4. Emphasis added. Hereafter the preceding document will be cited as: “MCBS Vol. 1.”

artillery, (and most uniquely) the armor and air arms, were not, as utilized by the Corps, the primary means for the attainment of an objective, nor were they the principle tools by which the chief offensive effect was to be achieved. In the Corps, all other arms and supports existed to support the infantry. The planes worked in concert with the ground force to eliminate barriers to infantry advance, so also did the artillery. The infantry did not deploy to assist armor; the armor deployed to assist the infantry. Again, the primary weapon of the Corps was the rifleman, the infantryman, the grunt. It was his job to take the beachhead. Not the guns of the Navy, not the planes of a MAW (Marine Air Wing), and neither the artillery nor the tanks of a Marine division held that task.³

(This is because no matter how intense a preparatory pounding by supporting arms in the Central Pacific and in Korea, a well-entrenched diehard enemy, such as the Japanese or North Koreans, survived and could only be brought out by infantry one bunker or cave at a time. Even so, Marines strongly advocated maximum use and integration of all available supporting arms, because, while many enemy remained for

³ Marion F. Sturkey, *Warrior Culture*, 114-115. Some have said that the Marine Corps is primarily a light infantry force, and that one reason it is thus is that it has never fought on the modern European battlefield against armor and mechanization. The Marine Corps was a light infantry force up to World War II. Afterwards, it was among the heaviest in the world. This is only untrue if one defines heavy infantry as only being mechanized infantry. As for the claim the Corps has never fought on the modern European battlefield or against armor and mechanization, the Corps has done both. In World War I, the Marine Corps fielded a brigade that fought alongside the Army in modern European warfare. In World War II, the Japanese employed tanks against the Marines, and the Marines against the Japanese. In Korea in particular, the Marine Corps's antitank units were approximately as heavy as the Army's, and the Marine Corps's tanks worked with infantry in the same tactics and doctrine as did the Army's. The Marine Corps did not have armored *divisions* in the Korean war that were trained to fight blitzkrieg-like armored lighting campaigns over hundreds of miles, but an armored division was hardly an infantry division. The Marine Division was among the heaviest infantry divisions in the world in 1950-1953. It was actually a small corps—see appendix on Marine Corps organization. One reason the Marine Division was so heavy compared to that of the Army was that it was designed with amphibious warfare in mind. All its supplies could go with it aboard ship, and it could be resupplied with ships, whereas the Army division had to carry much of its supplies with it across vast distances on the land and therefore could not carry as much organic equipment and supplies. On the other hand, when a Marine division fought a land campaign far away from the sea as in 1951, its organic supply infrastructure was inadequate compared to that of the Army, which had been designed and adjusted through long experience to better facilitate supply in land campaigns.

the infantry since shells could not reach them all, every enemy that could be eliminated with a shell was one less to dig out with rifles, grenades, demolitions, and American blood. In addition, the shelling suppressed enemy fire during an advance and was a severely effective weapon against enemy morale.)

For the Corps, the basic implement for the waging of successful combat proved to be the rifle-armed leatherneck, and this was true whether it was in the sweltering jungles of Haiti, Vietnam, and Nicaragua, the coral strewn beaches of the Pacific, or the frigid snows, rugged mountains, and stinking rice paddies of Korea. To this end, every Marine was taught first to be a rifleman, a “ground-pounder,” and then schooled in something else. Marines believed this focus on the basic implement of the infantry-man was not only unique, but made them better warriors. Today, Marines are quick to point out, that no other service in the world requires that its initiates qualify with a rifle at the distance Marines must fire at, 550 meters.⁴

In the AF view, on the other hand, CAS was not a priority, interdiction was, and air power, not infantry, was the primary arm for waging war.⁵

This is not to say that the first priority of the air power in an amphibious landing was not to first achieve air superiority. In this, the Air Force and Marine Corps/Navy air doctrine were in agreement. The first priority was always air superiority over the objective. The Air Force provided this air superiority in Korea, however, from time to time, Marine ground units were still attacked by a YAK or MIG fighter, though this was the exception rather than the rule. The Marine Corps continuously reemphasized the need in its orders and reports to maintain its aerial defense initiatives among its forces

⁴ Robert Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea*, 306-307.

⁵ Lynn Montross, et al., *The East-Central Front*, 169.

against air attack and that Korea in the respect of posing only a minor enemy air threat was not a typical war, especially if the Soviets openly intervened. The Marines were ordered not to become complacent or soft in this regard.

The Marine CAS system consisted of six key factors: short response time, accuracy, training, control from the ground – preferably by the unit needing the strike and the ones best placed to ensure it did not hit friendly lines, decentralization, and close impacts. Two other principles were also involved: “1. Unity of command and responsibility are necessary at the point of contact with the enemy; and, 2. The system for tactical air support of ground operations must be flexible, provide a simple and decisive procedure, and permit short notice of supporting air forces.” The above mentioned key factors in turn were unified by these characteristics of the system itself: it was reliable; “simple and flexible; communications [were] swift and direct; aircraft [were] made available and employed on short notice; and the front line unit normally control[ed] the aircraft dispatched to give it support.”⁶

The first factor, short response time, ensured that the strike got to the target within enough time to: have immediate effect on the situation on the ground, conserve friendly lives, and facilitate progress by infantry against an objective. “Working on the theory that close air support must be immediate if it is to be effective, the Marines have simplified their method of control. If air support is not available when the target develops, it may disappear or cause heavy casualties during the waiting time.” Marine response time for CAS is supposed to be within fifteen minutes to half-an hour of the request. “The average delay time in getting CAS in response to requests was 113 minutes during September.” Furthermore, even preplanned strikes for the morning

⁶ U. S. Marine Corps, “MCBS Vol. 1,” IV-B-3, IV-B-8.

hours, the most critical hours of the day because this was when the ground assault was usually launched, were only filled 20 percent of the time.⁷

The lack of a firm assurance that sorties in any number would be furnished in reply to stated requests contributed largely to the unsatisfactory nature of close air support for the 1st Marine Division. As a general rule, requests were not replied to, either affirmatively or negatively, in sufficient time for alternate planning. This meant that to be absolutely safe, the division was required to plan its operations without dependence upon air in any degree. . . . Prediction of requirements is utilized extensively in the Marine-Navy close air support process. Requests for air are formulated sufficiently in advance to enable the air commander to best meet varying needs. However, when the air plan is firm, confirmation is supplied to affected ground units, in time to modify the ground plan if necessary. . . .⁸

Allen R. Millett said the following of this aspect of the Marine/Navy system:

The Navy-Marine Corps system for both air requests and air direction stressed rapid response and decentralized management of close air-support sorties. After evaluating their wartime experience, principally on Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, by centralizing requests and direction in the *battalion level* Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP). Marine aviators and ground officers created a system that ensured that close air-support strikes would arrive within minutes. . . . The significant difference [compared to the Army/AF system] came in the degree of influence a ground force commander could exercise in requesting and conducting close air-support strikes. . . .

. . . [T]he Navy and the Marine Corps had a quick-response close air-support system. By eliminating the requirement that intervening ground force headquarters process requests, and by placing aircraft on station on regular schedules, the naval system ensured the strikes arrived only a few minutes after the FAC [Forward Air Controller] made his request. The short response time – supplemented by air direction skill and strike accuracy – constituted effective close air support for Marines.⁹

⁷ Andrew Geer, *New Breed*, 186. "Many of the best air targets are fleeting." 1MarDiv, "Report of CAS," "Observations on CAS for 1MarDiv during period 5-23 September 1951," "Enclosure 1," page 3; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 9-14; "Close Air Support Control in Korea: an Interview with Major William T. Porter, USMC, 12 October 1951" (Alfred M. Gray Research Center, Quantico, VA: Archives and Special Collections, Marine Corps Korean War document Collection, interview transcript folder dated 15 Dec 1951, copy in my possession): 4. Response time during the battles and campaigns of 1950 was usually within "a few minutes to half an hour." – U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS Vol.1," IV-B-13.

⁸ U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 9-17.

⁹ Allan R. Millett, "Korea, 1950-1953," 351-353 emphasis added.

Marine Corps doctrine also preferred the orbiting of aircraft “on station” above the infantry, ready to respond to a request at a moment’s notice. The AF (Air Force) absolutely opposed this.¹⁰

Stated the Marine Corps Board Study:

The practice . . . of orbiting a number of aircraft on station over the front line area insures that aircraft are immediately available, with pilots briefed on the local ground situation, for employment on shortest possible notice. [These planes could stay “on station” longer than Air Force planes because these usually deployed from a nearby carrier or land-based strip, not from Japan as the Air Force jets often did.] It also enables pilots of aircraft with large munitions loads to make attacks on several different targets during the time spent over the front line target area. The provision for short notice employment of aircraft is a fundamental requirement of the Marine Corps-Navy system. It insures that the front line unit will receive air support promptly after a request and causes the ground unit to place reliance upon air support. The employment of aircraft orbiting on station has been criticized as wasteful. It is to be noted, in connection with this charge, that the orbiting of aircraft is not a requirement of the system but rather is a means of insuring that aircraft are available for short notice employment when required to assist the ground forces. Other means, if they are as effective, can be used equally well, however, two important advantages accrue as a result of the practice of orbiting a number of aircraft over a front line area: first, as noted above, pilots are briefed on the local ground situation and second, the enemy front line area is kept under surveillance by aircraft capable of making immediate attacks.¹¹

In fact, on that last point, aircraft served much like cavalry in the 19th Century; the planes could swoop in on a fleeing or breaking enemy and cause great casualties among the retreating foe. They did this on numerous occasions in the Pusan Perimeter battles, the Inchon/Seoul campaign, and the Chosin Reservoir campaign. Another advantage of having the aircraft orbit was that upon several occasions in those campaigns, the eyes in the sky prevented ambushes by spying them out in advance, of

¹⁰ 1MarDiv, “Report of CAS,” “Memorandum for Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific,” on the subject of “Interim comments on close air support,” from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, dated 21 July 1951, 3-4.

¹¹ U.S. Marine Corps, “MCBS,” IV-B-8.

course OY observation craft could also serve this function without requiring fighter bombers to do it.

The Air Force system was embodied in the “Joint Training Directive for Air-Ground Operations.” This doctrine,

[W]hich the Air Force embraced as authoritative, made close air support difficult for a ground command to obtain. Basically, the Air-Ground Operations System (AGOS) required that a ground commander request air support prior to an operation and be very specific about his needs. Requests had to be processed through an Army operations officer (G-3 Air) from regiment through field army and reviewed by an Air Force officer at each echelon of command (the air liaison officer) until the request reached the Joint Operations Center (JOC), run by an Air Force general, which would allocate the available air strikes. The request system insured that close air support strikes were not likely to be tactically relevant, but the air direction system the Air Force preferred also added to the problem. The definition of close air support [to a Marine] was that air strikes should be coordinated with the fire and maneuver of the ground forces through the positive direction by a forward air controller (FAC) who was fully knowledgeable about the ground combat situation. There was no fundamental disagreement that a Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) with reliable air-ground communications (vehicle- or ground-mounted) should be available so the FAC could direct air strikes by sight, just like an artillery forward observer. The Air Force, however, did not want to use its own personnel for such missions, and it did not trust the Army to provide a competent FAC. The Air Force might provide an Air Liaison Party down to regimental level to do air-strike planning, but it was not going to send Air Force officers (presumably pilots) out to the front to direct air strikes.¹²

Under the Air Force system in 1951, which Marines were put under after the Hungnam Redeployment, CAS strikes averaged over an hour late when they arrived at all, and only half were effective. Many Army officers, too, were upset over having to use the Air Force JOC system and greatly preferred the Marine System of CAS. Among these were Maj. Gen. Edward Almond, CO of X Corps, and Maj. Gen. Clovis E. Byers, who would command X Corps at a later date. However, due to a trend towards squashing any issues of interservice contention, UNC repeatedly came down on the Air

¹² Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 20.

Force side of the issue and even relieved General Byers for being too friendly to the Marine system. The JOC system was inflexible where the Marines' was flexible. "The unwieldiness of the request and assignment procedure [under the JOC] continues to be evidenced in situations where a change of plans is indicated," but the plan was not changed because it was too difficult to modify or alter requests already made through the JOC because of the many intervening layers of bureaucracy that extended clear up to FAF and FEAC at the Army and theatre levels.¹³

Instead of ground controllers, the Air Force preferred having air-strikes controlled by another pilot flying "Mosquito" aircraft. The weakness of this was that an air controller *in the air* knew little of the ground combat situation, was not *on* the ground with the requesting unit and therefore could more easily mistake the target and hit friendly troops, was probably not trained in infantry techniques (Air Force and Navy officers were not), and the accuracy of the strike was moderate at best because no one on the ground was guiding it in (popping smoke or other means of identifying the target only alerted the enemy to take cover, thus making the strike ineffective). And "Mosquitoes," "were still hostage to the JOC system. Either the air strikes had to be pre-planned or they had to be requested as a matter of dire emergency."¹⁴

The AF viewed CAS as low if not last on the list of priorities for its aircraft or aircraft under its control. It wanted to focus on interdiction, and every plane taken away from that purpose was a waste in Air Force eyes, or a duplication of force. Air Force

¹³ Allan Millett, *Drive North*, 22, 56-59; U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," Chapter 9, Close Air Support (Byers already had one strike against him in that he was not of the clique of officers who had served in the ETO (European Theatre of Operations) in World War II – he had served in the Pacific); 1MarDiv, "Report of CAS," Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, LtGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, undated, pages 1-2; Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 892; 1MarDiv, "Report of CAS," Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, undated, page 2.

¹⁴ Allan Millett, *Drive North*, 22, 56-59.

officers (and the Army in general) believed CAS within the bomblines (the line in front of ground forces beyond which artillery could not reach) performed a job that should be done by artillery. In other words, anything within artillery range should be an artillery target, and to use air to hit it was a waste of air power.¹⁵

The Marines viewed things differently:

The Marine Corps method is to use all the fire support means which are available, to make timely use of those means, and to use them in adequate quantity in order to produce the necessary shock effect. In the situations encountered in Korea [1950] this shock action was attained by the coordinated employment of supporting aircraft, artillery, and organic infantry weapons [and NGF]. Air Force and in some instances Army sources have claimed that tactical air support is being used on artillery missions and that properly employed artillery would reduce the demands for tactical air support. Col S. L. A. Marshall [Army officer and noted analyst of military tactics] pointed out when queried on the Army's employment of artillery and tactical air support: "The effects of air and artillery are reciprocal rather than duplicatory and if we all begin to understand that, we would more perfectly integrate the use of both weapons." The flexibility inherent in the Marine Corps fire support coordination techniques permits the attainment of maximum effectiveness of supporting fires in any situation, a claim which has been fully borne out by Marine operations in Korea [1950].¹⁶

The next factor, accuracy, was essential to effective air support. This could only be gained through frequent and thorough practice by the pilots in CAS strikes on various targets from trenches, to caves, to tanks, to bunkers. With many enemy positions on the reverse slopes of hills, CAS strikes were often the only way to hit the enemy, especially in the rugged, mountainous terrain of Korea where indirect fire such as artillery could be extremely hampered in range and target selection. Artillery fire or mortars, and direct fire weapons like tanks, could usually not get in a bunker entrance on the reverse slope of a hill. And there was no question in the Marines' minds that CAS

¹⁵ 1MarDiv, "Report of CAS," Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, LtGen Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, undated, page 3-4.

¹⁶ U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS Vol. 1", IV-C-2.

was by far more devastating to enemy morale; it more effectively softened a position in minutes than could hours of preparatory artillery fire.

S. L. A. Marshall interviewed many Marines during the Chosin Reservoir operation. He concluded the following (never published before) of the Marine CAS system in regards to both friendly and enemy morale:

Line companies in the attack noted that artillery fire, even when generously used, and accurately delivered upon the target area, was not a marked depressant to CCF fire except at the moment when the shells were impacting. As these fires lifted, CCF automatic weapons immediately resumed the engagement. With the air strike, however, the shock to morale was noticeable and immediate. The position would go silent, even though CCF had not been eliminated by the bombing and strafing. From the examination of repeated instances of this character, it is even possible to hypothesize that the shock interval, in which the defender is unable so to command himself as to make use of such weapons as remain available to his hand, varies between 12 and 25 minutes, seemingly according to the extent of material damage and disarrangement done the defender. The transcendent morale value deriving from close air support is best explained in the words of one battalion commander in 1st Mar Div: "An air strike puts new zest and determination in our line in a way that no amount of artillery fire delivered before our eyes could do. The men see our pilots; they watch them come in low and take terrible chances. It makes them want to go forward again. The effect is as if they were drawn by a magnet. . . ."17

"Special loading," is another aspect of CAS that is important to accuracy. Under the JOC system, planes were loaded mostly for armed reconnaissance missions. But as one Marine CAS expert observed in 1951, it was more effective on a ground target to have a single plane loaded with the proper armament for CAS than to have many planes loaded for armed reconnaissance. Under JOC, an Air Force officer far from the scene of the combat decided on armament to hit a ground target, not the ground commander requesting the strike. Planes on strip alert or aboard a carrier could be special loaded for an air strike within minutes, and be airborne to carry it out with the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV-C-7.

right tools for the job – different rockets for different types of targets, napalm, different weights and assortments of bombs if a bunker need obliterating, etc.¹⁸

If a plane was out for armed reconnaissance and was only diverted to perform a CAS strike in an emergency, as often happened under the JOC system (which had little allowance for strip alert or special loading), the plane almost never had the ideal armament for the target at hand. Again special loading was part of accuracy, and this was because precision meant not just hitting the target but hitting it with something that would get the job done.

The Marine version of CAS had a different emphasis on accuracy than did that of the AF. For example:

On 5 July [1951] a large air attack was planned by 8th Army on a strong enemy locality in front of the 1st Marine Division. On the day preceding the attack the target was announced as a circle of 2,000 meters diameter centered on a specific point. Such a general area assignment is wholly foreign to the pinpoint technique which has come to be standard practice in the delivery of close air support fires under the Marine Corps-Navy system. Fortunately in this case the forward air controller involved was able to so direct the attacking aircraft that the 2,000 meter radius target previously assigned was ignored and the attack directed against sound tactical targets.¹⁹

In other words, to the Marines, if CAS was not accurate and focused with pinpoint precision, it was useless. This is just one more example of how the AF emphasis on interdiction and subsequent de-emphasis of CAS kept them from doctrinally mastering the fundamentals of effective CAS. Some individual pilots, did

¹⁸ Interview with Major William T. Porter, USMC, 12 October 1951; 1MarDiv, "Report of CAS," Letter of CG (commanding general) 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, to CG Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, dated 25 August 1951, page 3.

¹⁹ 1MarDiv, "Report of CAS," "Memorandum for Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific," on the subject of "Interim comments on close air support," from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, dated 21 July 1951, page 2.

provide effective support, but as a whole, the AF did not care enough about CAS to make it more effective.²⁰

The factor of training went hand in hand with accuracy (meaning the aviators trained as infantry, knew what infantry needed, understood infantry tactics, and *trained* closely with the infantry in CAS doing the very things that would be expected in a CAS strike on the battlefield). The pilots to fly CAS in combat needed to have trained extensively in peacetime to do so. Furthermore, this factor meant that the pilots had not just trained in CAS, but trained closely *with* the Marine ground forces they were to support. You cannot expect to have effective close coordination with ground fire and maneuver if you do not train in such regularly. The 1MAW trained closely with the 1Mar Div before the war and proved itself effective in supporting the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade in the Pusan Perimeter, making some of the first kills of the feared T-34 tanks in the war. And in the 1MarDiv request of 30 Oct 1951, wherein the CG 1MarDiv made requests of what constituted ideal CAS for his division, it was stated that the Marines preferred Marine aircraft (meaning the 1MAW) to Navy or AF because of the more extensive training of the pilots with that division. Training also meant that the Marines knew the limitations and capabilities of all supporting arms and that Marine pilots knew these for the infantry.²¹

²⁰ Allan R. Millett, "Korea, 1950-53," 349.

²¹ 1Mar Div "Report on CAS," letter of 30 Sep 1951, from CG 1Mar Div to CG EUSAK, via CG X Corps, "Comments on ORO-R-3 Close Air Support Operations in Korea," page 3; Lynn Montross, et al., *U. S. Marine Operations in Korea Vol I*; 1Mar Div, "Report of CAS," Letter of CG 1Mar Div to CICFEC (Commander in Chief, Far East Command), via CG X Corps and CG Eighth Army, "Close Air Support," dated 18 Oct 1951, page 2; Letter of CG (commanding general) 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, to CG Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, dated 25 August 1951, page 3. Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 447-448: "No new aviator lieutenants were trained in 1946-1950 without first serving as ground officers."

The state of Marine training of combat units prior to Korea had a heavy emphasis on CAS, despite the peacetime budgetary cuts:

The intensity, diversity, and realism of the pre-Korean training conducted by FMF elements was a major factor in the combat success of the Brigade, 1stMarDiv, and 1stMAW. Unit training constantly emphasized the fundamental Marine Corps conviction that initiative, professional competence, and leadership in junior officers and noncommissioned officers must be developed. Through combined exercises of the various ground arms and services with supporting air, valuable experience was gained in the skillful exploitation and use of the maximum capabilities of the supporting arms and services. . . .

Training programs were based on the assumption that expeditionary duty involving combat was imminent. There was a continued insistence on realistic operations (as realistic as peacetime safety and budgetary considerations permitted), under combat conditions for both combat and service units. For combat units, frequent live firing training problems were a requirement. . . .

During the pre-Korean period, FMF units conducted numerous ground and air-ground training problems, field exercises, command post, and amphibious exercises. Particularly significant were the reinforced infantry battalion and regimental field exercises which habitually employed close air support. It was through these exercises that ground commanders, staffs, and troops acquired increased knowledge of the employment and capabilities of close air support and confidence in the results to be obtained from its use. At the same time, aviation commanders, pilots, and forward air controllers were not only maintaining a high level of proficiency in current techniques and procedures but were also developing improved techniques in identification and location of friendly front lines and enemy targets and for providing close air support best suited to various ground force schemes of maneuver.²²

Closely allied to accuracy and training was the factor of ground control (meaning also that actual *pilots* served *with* the infantry as Forward Air Controllers, so someone who knew tactical aviation from the pilot's perspective and combat from the infantryman's view, particularly in the pertinent situation at hand, would be guiding the pilot to the target). This meant that a Marine *pilot* was with the infantry as a FAC. He would then guide in the pilots to the target by radio, talking directly to them. A pilot on the scene with the ground forces was, in Marine eyes, far more effective than an airborne "mosquito." There were also several advantages to this system. For one thing,

²² U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS," IV-A-5.

the pilot was on site with the men the strike was to support, was familiar with flying CAS from the cockpit and thus could talk the plane onto target more effectively. CAS could be brought much closer to friendly lines with the skill this technique facilitated, and therefore, the infantry had less distance to cross when the strike was lifted, thus allowing them to bridge the gap and get at the enemy while his head was still down from the bombardment, and save infantry lives because the men would be exposed to enemy fire for a shorter interval. Furthermore, "Battalions are not required to consult with or receive assent from higher echelons, in regard to requests for air support or in regard to control of aircraft delegated for accomplishing supporting missions. . . . This Procedure requires but a few minutes. It is flexible and decisive. A minimum of time elapses between the time of request for a mission and the execution of the mission." And, having the strike under the control of the unit making the request, and thus under the command of the ground commander, the strike was much better utilized in a manner critical to the progress of the infantry towards their objective. (It would be under an AF officer in the JOC system).²³

Under the JOC system, air support was provided to the Eighth Army by "Mosquito" planes flown by AF personnel rather than FACs on the ground with the infantry. (However, the 1MarDiv retained its own FACs despite the addition of the Mosquitoes.) These Mosquito planes acted as orbiting controllers and guided in CAS planes to the targets via radio. However, they were in the air, not on the ground and thus much less familiar with the ground combat situation, had no infantry training, were AF officers under the command of JOC, not the unit on the ground, and being airborne had nearly as much trouble discerning the location of friendly lines as the CAS planes

²³ *Ibid.*, IV-B-6.

they were to guide. (An FAC on the ground *with* the unit receiving support knew where friendly lines were because he was a part of them.)

An Army report on CAS described the Mosquito control system in such a way as to “leave no doubt of the superiority of ground-controlled air attacks over the Mosquito system.” However, one Marine expert on CAS in 1951 pointed out that the Mosquito system was *complementary* to the FAC system because Mosquitoes could sometimes communicate with aircraft for the FAC, when the FAC’s radio malfunctioned and could not contact the CAS aircraft but could contact the Mosquito. In other words, the Mosquito acted as an emergency relay in such instances, and the radios failed often enough to make such a safety net necessary. And while the Mosquito was not exactly organic to Marine doctrine as working independent from any FAC, Marine doctrine did allow for airborne controllers as TACs (tactical air controllers). These could sometimes see targets out of sight of the FAC. Thus it can be seen that the Marine system was “augment[ed]” by the Mosquito system rather than the latter being obviated by the former. In fact, if a mosquito pilot flew one area enough, or had enough experience, they improved in their technique and could be effective in situations where the target could be seen from the air. However, both North Korean and CCF doctrine stressed camouflage to such a degree that it was hard indeed to see a target from the air that was not already spotted by someone on the ground. (The JOC system as practiced in Korea was not instated in Vietnam or Iraq. Some commanders thought this a mistake, while others, a big relief.)²⁴

²⁴ 1MarDiv, “Report of CAS,” Letter of CG (commanding general) 1MarDiv, MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, to CG Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, dated 25 August 1951, page 4; Interview with Major William T. Porter, USMC, 12 October 1951; Headquarters, Eighth U. S. Army Korea, “Enemy Tactics.” The Army as a whole did not view the Mosquito system as inferior.

Marines believed absolutely that effective CAS reduced friendly infantry casualties and that lack of effective CAS increased them. The 1MarDiv, in 1951 believed that the most effective use of CAS was, “success[fully] . . . destroying the enemy with a consequent saving in lives” In answer to an assessment in an Army report on CAS that, “the [Marine] ground forces can, if necessary, plan and execute ground operations *without* close air support . . . [and that] therefore the requirement for close air support on the basis of *absolute necessity* is zero,” MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, CG 1MarDiv, wrote that: “. . . the same can be stated for any supporting arms recognizing throughout that fires delivered by supporting arms can serve to make the task of the infantry easier to reduce casualties. It is considered that the significant element in this aspect of the evaluation is a determination of what air support may be estimated as a minimum requirement *under conditions where the ground and air elements involved are properly trained and equipped for the coordinate task.*” The Marines felt so strongly that effective CAS saved lives that Thomas even referred to it as a “matter . . . of life and death to a Marine and we will have to see it through.”²⁵

The benefit of CAS to the Marine fight of September, 1951 is further demonstrated in Thomas’s words:

Close air support of our units operating in this terrible terrain and with a paucity of artillery and supporting ground weapons of a nature to make a Ft. Sill graduate weep, is an absolute necessity. As a saver of casualties, its effect – if properly delivered – cannot be overestimated. Since I assumed command of this Division, it has suffered 504 KIA and 4468 WIA, Marines. At the same time, there were 308 KIA and 1559 WIA in the Korean Marines. [A regiment of ROK Marines (the only such regiment in existence) was attached to 1MarDiv for much of 1951.] I

²⁵ 1MarDiv ‘Report of CAS.’ “Enclosure 1,” page 10; Letter of CG (commanding general) 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, to CG Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, dated 25 August 1951, page 5; Letter to CG EUSAK (Eighth U. S. Army in Korea) from CG 1MarDiv, Gerald C. Thomas, dated 30 September 1951, pages 2-3, emphases in original; 1. General Holland M. Smith made the same arguments about NGF after Iwo Jima.

have acquired a lot of experience. My recent action, as you know, has been far from hasty [in regards to pushing the issue of inadequate CAS with the FAF (Fifth Air Force) and EUSAK (Eighth U. S. Army in Korea) and CINCFEC (Commander in Chief Far East Command)]. . . . I know what I am talking about when I say that a great percentage of those casualties could have been saved by adequate and timely close air support.²⁶

The effects of artillery compared to CAS were further obviated by the fact that there was usually a pattern to it. "Enemy prisoners indicated that they had been able to march into attack positions through artillery fire simply by studying its pattern." An airstrike was not predictable if done right and quickly, and napalm covered a wide enough area in its blast that no troops could plot any avoidable pattern.²⁷

Centralization on the highest level and decentralization at any lower level (down to the battalion) (centralized command of CAS, and coordination was at the battalion level with the Marines, as opposed to division or even corps level in the Army, so even though command of an air strike was under a single officer of the battalion Tactical Air Control Party, there was decentralization in that units as low as the battalion could make these decisions instead of only one single operations center for an entire corps or army like the JOC of the Air Force). This meant that Marine CAS would be provided by Marine "planes under the direct control of the ground commander which could not be diverted to other employment by a higher echelon." In other words, "Over-all control of aircraft is highly centralized, but control of aircraft employed on close support missions is decentralized to the maximum extent." So while the TACC (Tactical Air Control Center – the highest echelon of tactical air control) would be in control of all tactical support aircraft *in general*, the ground commander requesting an air strike would be *in*

²⁶ Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, undated, page, 3.

²⁷ Headquarters, Eighth U. S. Army Korea, "Enemy Tactics," 17.

control of aircraft assigned that strike *specifically*, and he would have this control through his TACP (Tactical Air Control Party), wherein resided his FAC (Forward Air Controller). TACPs were assigned in Marine doctrine from the battalion level and up (the lowest echelon that could receive permanent assignment of a TACP under the Army/AF system was the division). This meant that under the Marine system a *battalion commander* could get on the line and request air *directly* from the TACC (Tactical Air Control Center) or TADC (Tactical Air Direction Center -- a subordinate part of the TACC located at Corps level) without having to go through intervening levels of bureaucracy.²⁸

In the words of the "Marine Corps Board Study: Evaluation of the Influence of Marine Corps Forces on the Course of the Korean War," this was as follows:

Marine Corps and Navy air units are trained to conduct tactical air supporting operations under a single force commander who commands or controls all forces in a prescribed area. These operations involve gaining air superiority, general and close air support, observation, reconnaissance, liaison, air transport, and general utility and miscellaneous air operations including transport of troops in helicopters.

The system for tactical air support involves positive control of all air operations through a central control agency at the headquarters of the force commander and subordinate control agencies, as integral parts of subordinate units down to and including Marine battalions. The system further provides for a request procedure whereby a unit commander of a battalion or larger unit may request air support *direct* by radio to the highest control agency *and for a control procedure whereby the requesting unit commander controls the aircraft dispatched in answer to his request.*²⁹

Under the Air Force system, a battalion commander would have to request the air up through his chain of command the day before to regiment, division, corps, and

²⁸ Andrew Geer, *New Breed*, 184; U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS Vol. 1," IV-B-8; Allan R. Millett, "Korea, 1950-1953," 350. "Ground commander" here means the battalion, regimental, or division commander had command of his FACs and through them, the plane making the strike. This did *not* mean ground commanders allocated overall air applications or commanded the Marine air wing.

²⁹ U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS Vol. 1," IV-B-3 and B-4 (emphasis added).

then army level (where the JOC was located) and have the strike preplanned. *But* it may or may not even get approval depending on AF priorities for air power that day, and when the strike arrived on station, the pilots would likely be from the AF (therefore having little training in CAS) and would have little or no idea of the ground situation. Then to top all this off, the ground commander would have *no control* over the strike; it would be directed by a Mosquito flown by an AF officer (with no infantry training), and the strike would certainly *not* be coordinated with artillery, NGF, and infantry action, resulting in as little integration with the actions of the ground forces as could be imagined and a subsequent degree of inopportunity and ineffectiveness with and on the ground situation. In other words, the AF system directly reflected the AF and Army view (official view despite many lower echelon Army officers' preference for the Marine system) that "land power and air power are coequal and interdependent forces; neither is the auxiliary of the other."³⁰

This was in direct contrast to the Marine Corps/Navy view demonstrated in these words by the Marine Corps Board Study:

The air operations are closely integrated with and a primary supporting arm for ground force operations in the assault and seizure of physical objectives. The plans for supporting air operations are determined . . . by the requirements of the ground forces being supported [as opposed to the AF system where *air requirements* determine the plans for ground support]. The assistance rendered by air is not only general, but is also direct; it is made reliably available and is closely integrated with fire and maneuver of the ground forces. The primary measure of effectiveness of tactical air support is the amount of direct assistance

³⁰ Allan R. Millett, "Korea, 1950-1953," 347 – Allan R. Millett was quoting Army FM 100-20, *The Command and Employment of Air Power* (July, 1943) which established "several important doctrines" of the Army/AF concept for air-ground operations. This manual, says Millett, was superseded by another that maintained the same core concept down through the Korean War. This was: FM 31-35, *Air-Ground Operations* (1946), which devised the JOC. Millett goes on to say that this manual was revised just prior to the Korean war, and a new "Joint Training Directive for Air-Ground Operations" (September 1, 1950), abbreviated JTD, was applied to how air-ground operations would be conducted in Korea, but, basically, the doctrine remained that of FM 31-35 throughout Korea. (I have a copy of FM 31-35 in my possession.)

provided to the ground force in executing its scheme of maneuver and seizing its objective.”³¹

However, though the *purpose* and *application* of air power in Marine eyes was to support the ground effort and be integrated with it, the commander of the 1MAW was not subordinate to the commander of the 1MarDiv. Rather, as in the Army/AF system, the two were coequal (this does not mean their purposes were coequal like the AF and the Army saw theirs as). They cooperated with one another and were under the same administrative commander, FMFPAC (Fleet Marine Force Pacific) commander, LtGen Lemuel Shepherd through much of the war of movement in Korea, and were both part of X Corps while it was an independent command. But under the JOC system, the 1MAW was part of FAF and the 1Mar Div was under Eighth Army. Operationally, their lowest common commander was General Ridgway, CINUNC (Commander in Chief United Nations Command).

Marine Corps ground commanders did not command Marine aviation units as some Air Force officers thought. Navy and Marine units assigned to an amphibious task force functioned under the direction of a single air officer. During the assault phase, this officer would be a Navy officer, but during extended operations ashore it would be a Marine aviator. Marine aircraft wings were not attached to Marine divisions. Either aircraft wing commanders and division commanders worked on a cooperative basis (as did Army field army commanders and Air Force tactical air commanders) or they functioned under a common superior, the amphibious task force commander or the landing force commander once ashore.³²

The Marine system of decentralization was heavily influenced by amphibious doctrine. While one Tactical Air Control Center indeed had administrative and operational control over all tactical air from the Joint Expeditionary Force level down, it

³¹ U. S. Marine Corps, “MCBS Vol. 1,” IV-B-4.

³² Allan R. Millett, “Korea, 1950-1953,” 352.

did not micromanage tactical control over all this air – thus there was decentralization even though there was only one over all tactical air commander.

In an amphibious operation of large scope there is one Tactical Air Control Center – at the Joint Expeditionary Force level. In view of the size of the operation, however, that Center does not in fact attempt to exercise tactical air control; it serves essentially as a means of making general distributions of aircraft, from those available, to the various air defenses, air support, and related missions, maintaining a certain number in reserve against unexpected eventualities. The subordinate attack forces each have a Tactical Air Direction Center [at corps level], under whose direct control all assigned aircraft operate. . . . This Tactical Air Direction Center should in fact exercise control over the delivery of air support within the corps.³³

The fact that Marines viewed air support doctrine and land operations through the prism of amphibious warfare, a doctrine neither unadapted nor unsuited to expeditionary or land warfare, as Marine experience had shown through Okinawa and then the Inchon/Seoul and Wonsan/Chosin Reservoir campaigns, is again shown in the following excerpt from the same document.

The present arrangement in Korea [the Army/AF JOC system] fails to exploit any of the desirable aspects of decentralization. The tactical air control function is discharged from the top-most level in operations which extend over a front of one hundred and forty (140) miles. Such an attempt at centralization would be unthinkable in an amphibious operation. You will recall that at Okinawa where the landing attack initially extended over a front of about fifteen (15) miles there was a Tactical Air Direction Center for each of the two (2) Attack Forces, and later one for each of the two (2) corps after they were established ashore.³⁴

One reason Marines did not trust over-centralization of CAS is summed up in these words, “The statement that, ‘in general, the headquarters of an Army is no more

³³ 1MarDiv, “Report of CAS,” Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, 21 July 1951, page 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, page 5.

able to determine the priority of individual targets for close support than for artillery,' is considered wholly sound and reflective of a basic weakness in the existing system."³⁵

The way the Marine system worked, TACPs were located at each level of command from division down to battalion level. This greatly decentralized not only the requesting of CAS but the control of actual strikes in a way the AF, having only recently won independence from the Army and exclusive control over air warfare (except for the remnants of airpower in the hands of the Navy and the Marine Corps), did not trust. In each Marine Division there were thirteen TACPs, one for each battalion (nine), one for each regiment (three), and one for the division itself (one). Each TACP was linked directly by radio to the TACC (or TADC). The TACC would assign aircraft to a TACP to control for each request for an air strike (sent to the TACC by a TACP along the Tactical Air Radio net or TAR).³⁶

The whole process from request to delivery of a Marine CAS strike under the Navy/Marine system went like this:

The battalion commander requests tactical air support through his own battalion TACP, transmitting by radio direct to the TACC at highest level (or to a TADC at Corps level). The net is monitored by the TACPs of adjacent battalions, the parent regiment, and division FSCC [Fire Support Coordination Center]. Silence on the part of those agencies monitoring the net indicates they have no objection to the requested mission, whereupon the TACC (or TADC at corps level) acts on the request immediately. Coordination as necessary with artillery and naval gunfire, is accomplished by the appropriate FSCC. Thereafter the mission is assigned to an airborne flight of aircraft. The requesting TACP is notified of the aircraft assigned, the approximate time of attack and whether or not the strike is to be directly controlled by the TACP [it usually was – the only times when it was controlled by an airborne TAC (Tactical Air Controller, like a Mosquito under the AF system) was if the target was out of sight of the TACP's FAC such as on the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Letter entitled "Comments on ORO-R-3 Close Air Support Operations in Korea," addressed to CG EUSAK, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, via CG X Corps, 30 September 1951. This document consisted of Marine commentary, paragraph by paragraph, of a U. S. Army evaluation of "the close air support problem" in Korea.

³⁶ U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS Vol. 1," IV-B-6.

reverse slope of a ridge]. This procedure requires but a few minutes. It is flexible and decisive. A minimum of time elapses between the time of request for a mission and the execution of the mission.³⁷

As for the factor of close impacts --meaning the strike could be delivered in very close proximity to friendly lines well within the limits of artillery range, the following quote from Andrew Geer is informative:

The daily risks Marine airmen take to assist the Marine on the ground are the direct result of *esprit*, training and indoctrination. The Marine aviator believes the chief reason for his existence is to furnish assistance to the rifleman on the ground. By "close" the Marines mean the immediate area of the front lines.

As a result of continual association and training, Marine air and ground personnel have worked out a system designed to deliver "customer satisfaction," the customer in this case being the rifleman. Marine airmen have made many new and happy customers in the United Nations forces in Korea.

One Army infantry captain wrote in the *Combat Forces Journal*, "Our tactical air arm should spend a few months with the Marines. I don't know what causes the difference, but it is there. The Marine pilots give us the impression that they are breaking their hearts to help us out and are as much in the show as we are."³⁸

An example of CAS *close* to the lines that also shows the potential tactical decisiveness of such close CAS is from the battle for Obong-ni Ridge, 18 August 1950.

To illustrate the importance of air support at the right time and place, we return . . . [to the battle of Obong-ni Ridge]. Marine ground forces had already suffered two hundred and sixty-seven casualties. Fenton and Stevens, with two depleted companies [there were only two rifle companies per battalion at this time – the third was absent due to peacetime T/Os – so this battalion had not the ordinary reserve to help it], held a precarious foothold. Throughout the night they had barely managed to fight off strong enemy counterattacks.

Continued penetration of the enemy's lines was essential. At seven o'clock Stevens resumed the attack to dislodge the enemy on Hill 117. Despite heavy supporting fires from mortars and artillery, the assault unit was pinned down by a nest of four machine guns on the eastern slope.

Further assault by the Marines of Able Company would have been extremely costly and there was doubt that even a resolute attack would be

³⁷ *Ibid.*, IV-B-6. "Battalions are not required to consult with or receive assent from higher echelons, in regard to requests for air support or in regard to control of aircraft delegated for accomplishing supporting missions."

³⁸ Andrew Geer, *New Breed*, 190.

successful. Stevens asked for an air strike. Overhead the orbiting Corsairs were briefed and the target marked. Within minutes, a five hundred-pound bomb was placed on the position and the guns were obliterated.

From that moment, the issue was no longer in doubt. The enemy began to withdraw; the withdrawal became a rout under the combined assault of ground and air. Before the day was over, the enemy was driven across the Naktong [River] and the river was clogged with the dead.³⁹

That five hundred-pound bomb was dropped close enough to Marine lines to bowl over a few Marines with the concussion, but the effect on Marine morale was stupendous, the effect on that of the enemy, crushing.⁴⁰

Another pertinent quote to the close proximity of Marine CAS to the front lines, which the Korean War era 1st Marine Air Wing (1st MAW) was famous for delivering without friendly casualties, follows:

. . . on 10 January 1951 Brig. General Homer W. Kiefer, commanding 7th Infantry Division Artillery, wrote the Commandant of the Marine Corps: "During the period 19 September to 20 December 1950 close air support of this division was furnished almost exclusively by the 1st Marine Air Wing . . . in 57 days of combat 1,024 sorties were flown by Marine aircraft (largely Corsairs) in close support of the division without a single casualty among our own troops due to friendly air action. This record I attribute to the fact that adequate control was available with front line units. In many instances Marine planes were bombing and strafing within 200 yards of our front lines. . . . Allow me to reemphasize my appreciation for the outstanding air support received by this division. The Marine system of control, in my estimation, approaches the ideal and I firmly believe that a similar system should be adopted as standard for Army divisions." In his endorsement Major General Edward M. Almond, X Corps commander, declared he wished to "emphasize" Kiefer's final statement regarding the Marine system of Tactical Air Control, which "has proved itself on every occasion." General MacArthur added that "this correspondence again illustrates the outstanding support that Marine air is providing ground forces in Korean operations." (Fourth endorsement.)⁴¹

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 190-91.

⁴⁰ Jon T. Hoffman, Colonel, USMCR, "1st Marine Division Korea History," in Robert J. Martin, ed., *First Marine Division, Vol. II: Korea* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 2000): 14.

⁴¹ Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II*, (Washington, D.C.: Combat Forces Press, 1952): 290n; U. S. Marine Corps, "MCBS Vol. II," Appendix # 62.

The rule of thumb used by Marine aviators to calculate the closest distance from friendly lines to drop a bomb is about a hundred yards of distance per hundred pounds of explosive, i.e. one yard of distance for each pound of explosive.⁴²

For the entire Marine involvement in the actions in Korea of 1950, this Marine Corps/Navy system was employed. This was even though, during the Pusan Perimeter phase, and Northeast Korea Operations phase, FAF (Fifth Air Force) was technically in control. This was because, “due to special circumstances, Marine aviation units were able to support ground units, almost without exception” Those special circumstances were: the fluid nature of the war, the fact that the Army Air Force JOC had not yet been fully emplaced, the fact that X Corps, of which the Marines were a part, was a separate command than Eighth Army for a time, and some gentlemen’s agreements between the 1 MAF, 1MarDiv, and FAF. But beginning in January 1951, the FAF and the JOC were calling the shots, and the mission of Marine air was diluted from supporting just the 1MarDiv and X Corps to supporting all of Eighth Army.⁴³

In balance to the Marine view of CAS was that of the AF. The AF viewed interdiction as preeminent and any CAS as secondary in priority. Said Major General Otto P. Weyland, Commanding General FFAF (Far East Air Force):

I might suggest that all of us should keep in mind the limitations of air forces as well as their capabilities. Continuous CAS along a static front requires dispersed and sustained fire power against pinpoint targets. With conventional weapons there is no opportunity to exploit the characteristic mobility and fire power of air forces against worthwhile concentrations. In a static situation close support is an expensive substitute for artillery fire. It pays its greatest dividends when the enemy’s sustaining capability has been crippled and his logistics cut to a minimum while his forces are immobilized by interdiction and armed

⁴² United States Navy and Marine Corps, *NAVMC-4159: PHIB 12, Amphibious Operations: Air Operations* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Schools, 1948): 37.

⁴³ U. S. Marine Corps, “MCBS Vol. 1” IV-B-9; Allan R. Millett, “Korea, 1950-1953.”

reconnaissance. Then decisive results can be obtained as the close-support effort is massed in coordination with determined ground action.⁴⁴

“General Weyland insisted that in the summer and fall of 1951 ‘it would have been sheer folly not to have concentrated the bulk of our air effort against interdiction targets in the enemy rear areas. Otherwise, the available firepower would have been expended inefficiently against relatively invulnerable targets along the front, while the enemy was left to build up his resources to launch and sustain a general offensive.’ . . . [But] Try as they might, the UN air forces could not prevent the arrival of the 2,900 tons of rations, fuel, ammunition, and other supplies needed every day by the 58 Communist divisions at the front.”⁴⁵

The AF also had a gross misunderstanding--Marines thought they did not care enough to try to understand--of the tenets of the Marine system. They thought Marine units had less artillery than Army land units and so habitually used CAS in place of artillery. This was erroneous. Marine Divisions had the same amount of organic artillery as Army Infantry Divisions. (See chapter on organization.) The AF also had no concept of the tactical value an airstrike could provide to an infantry force. All of this is amply demonstrated in the manner in which the subject is addressed in the AF official history on the Korean War.⁴⁶

The AF did not consider quick response to be a key factor in CAS at all. Said Robert Futrell, the author of the Official History of the AF in Korea:

Since the Marines used air support as a substitute for artillery, they had to have forward air observers in each of their battalions. To assure an air strike within five

⁴⁴ Lynn Montross, et al., *The East-Central Front*, 169.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

⁴⁶ Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950-1953*, (Washington, D. C., Air Force History and Museums Program, 2000 – reprint of the revised 1983 edition, originally published in 1961): 705.

or ten minutes, they had to have combat air craft on “air-alert” stations over the front lines almost continually. The Army, on the other hand, preferred to employ air strikes against targets which were normally outside the range of its artillery. Even if these remote targets were moving, they could not normally be expected to reach friendly positions for some time. These more remote targets were usually too far from the front to be visible to observers on the ground. In a normal situation, the Army would have adequate time to employ the “call-type” air-support missions which were more conservative of scarce air capabilities than were “air-alert” missions.⁴⁷

The charge that the Marine system “required” the on station orbiting of air craft was blatantly false, just one of many straw men scattered throughout the above passage. While Marines preferred to have on station air over the battlefield when moving forward in the attack, it was certainly not a requirement. Said the Marine Corps Board Study:

The employment of aircraft orbiting on station has been criticized as wasteful. It is to be noted, in connection with this charge, that the orbiting of aircraft is not a requirement of the system but rather is a means of insuring that aircraft are available for short notice employment when required to assist the ground forces. Other means, if they are as effective, can be used equally well, however, two important advantages accrue as a result of the practice of orbiting a number of aircraft over a front line area: first, as noted above, pilots are briefed on the local ground situation and second, the enemy front line area is kept under surveillance by aircraft capable of making immediate attacks.⁴⁸

In fact, General Thomas tried to work a compromise called “strip alert” of air craft where the planes did not orbit the battle-field at all, but where a few planes from the 1MAW were kept on a strip close to the area of ground operations on “alert” ready to head to the skies and execute emergency CAS on short rather than extended notice. The compromise did not work too well as can be seen in the letters quoted from General Thomas on the subject earlier on.

⁴⁷ Robert F. Futrell, *United States Air Force in Korea*, 705.

⁴⁸ U.S. Marine Corps, “MCBS,” IV-B-8.

The AF and UNC saw the 1MarDiv as greedy to strive to get the 1MAW to support it with CAS. To them, the Marines were not an “air ground team;” they were just one more infantry division in Korea, never mind their preferred doctrine for combat, never mind the fact that they were not being allowed to fight the way they had trained – and any unit is at its least potential state of effectiveness when it does not train the way it fights and fight the way it trained.⁴⁹

In the words of the 1MarDiv CG:

I told him [AF Gen Everest] that my interest was in this division; that we brought our own aircraft along to this war; that our officers and men were trained and fought with the expectation of receiving air support; that the others had not brought their aircraft; that they had never trained with it [and thus could not utilize it as effectively], nor ever expected it and that arguments concerning the unfairness of so supporting us would not stand examination.⁵⁰

General Ridgway, the theatre commander, had some understanding of MajGen Thomas’s position, but still thought differently than did the Marines.

I fully understand the natural desire of any Marine Corps ground commander to be supported in combat by Marine Corps close support aviation. This was the expressed desire of your predecessor [MajGen Oliver P. Smith] during my service in command of Eighth Army.

Moreover, I am of the opinion that such close air support, by reason principally of intimate combined training and of long and intimate association of the air and ground officers concerned, will be of greater tactical effectiveness, other factors being equal. It is not, in my opinion, at all unnatural for you to desire that the 1st Marine Air Wing be permanently assigned to your direct support. In fact were the 1st Marine Air Division again operating as an independent command in this Theatre, such an assignment might logically be made, as I believe it was in a previous operation [in either the Pusan Perimeter, Inchon/Seoul, or Chosin Reservoir campaigns].

1st Marine Division is not, however, conducting independent operations. It is but one Division in a Corps of several Divisions, which in turn is but one of four combat Corps. All these units are engaged in a common struggle for a single

⁴⁹ 1MarDiv, “Report of CAS,” Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, undated, page 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, 4 Oct. 1951, page 2.

objective, as too are all supporting naval and air units participating in the Korean Campaign.

The real issue raised by your [MajGen Gerald C. Thomas, CG 1MarDiv] request [to have the 1MAW support only the 1MarDiv when the 1MarDiv is in combat and for a minimum number of CAS sorties per day of combat to be provided the 1MarDiv] is whether one Division among many on the line in Korea is to receive a wholly disproportionate close air support, at the expense of all other Divisions, in order that the Marine Corps contingent – ground and air – may operate as it was intended and organized to operate, as a separate force on Marine Corps missions, or whether the Marine Air Wing like all other combat air elements available to this Command, shall be employed in as equitable support of all elements of the ground forces as the tactical situation dictates, and the Marine Division itself receive neither more nor less than its equally gallant and deserving companion divisions. [But the other divisions were *not* receiving their due in Marine eyes – the *whole of Eighth Army* was being deprived of CAS by the AF.]⁵¹

However, the idea that the 1MarDiv would receive a disproportionate amount of CAS was flawed in the Marine view. The Marines saw *anything less than a full MAW supporting one division as disproportionate*, and that if the other divisions received less than that in equivalent, that was because they were not using the most effective doctrine for CAS or that the AF was not using the most effective overall employment of tactical air power. (The other divisions would only receive less if the JOC allocated less than the amount of one Air Wing per division to them, something the AF would not conscience because it saw interdiction as the primary mission of air power, and CAS inside the bomblines as merely duplicating artillery.) The Marines thought that Army commanders, too, should insist on the maximum possible amount of CAS for their divisions (something MajGen Edward Almond, CG X Corps, and his successor, Clovis E. Byers, both believed in and fought for with the latter even being relieved for it); that the AF JOC doctrine was not just less effective but deeply flawed; that their more sound techniques should replace the JOC system for the entire theatre; and that the JOC

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Letter to CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, from CINCUNC General Matthew B. Ridgway, 15 Oct. 1951, pages 1-2.

system was only being propped up by AF partisanship and the belief that CAS was a waste of airplanes compared to interdiction -- never mind the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of sending fighter-bombers, especially single-prop aircraft such as the F4U Corsair, to do the work of bombers and jets hundreds of miles behind enemy lines and even as far north as the Yalu River.⁵²

(There were eight fighter-bomber air wings besides the 1 MAW in the Korean theatre and four corps in EUSAK – there were many more air wings for fighter-interception, fighter-escort, and other tasks. CAS was only required when a division was actively engaged in combat. A division in reserve did not need CAS. So estimating that there were about three divisions per corps, the number of divisions in Korea numbered approximately twelve in 1951. The number of aircraft in theatre capable of providing the

⁵² *Ibid.*, Letter to CG Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Lt. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, from CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, 4 Oct. 1951, page 2. Thomas wrote: "I feel we are strong in our position and that the Army will give us full support [this was before Ridgway's letter of 15 October] – right up to Ridgway himself. *They want to confront the Air Force with a working system and we offer them the opportunity to do it.*" (Emphasis added). As for AF partisanship: "It will be remembered that Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg had been unalterably opposed to sending any Marine aviation to Korea ('. . . from a sensitive feeling here at the Pentagon,' David Lawrence noted in the *Herald-Tribune*, 'that the Marines should not have their own aviation')." -- Robert Heintz, *Victory at High Tide*, 22. And with the threat to Marine aviation and even the very existence of the Marine Corps only recently (and temporarily) defeated in the Unification Crisis (see: Keiser, *U. S. Marine Corps and Defense Unification* and the opening chapters of Robert Heintz, *Victory at High Tide*, as well as Robert Heintz, *Soldiers of the Sea*, 527), it is understandable why the Marines should suspect the decision to split up the air-ground team as having less to do with the reasons stated by Ridgway and officers in the AF, and more to do with the extension of AF control over Marine aviation. Besides, it was understood when the Marines were initially requested by MacArthur that the Marine air-ground team was not to be broken up. MacArthur himself said as much, but, "this view was anything but accepted in Washington." -- Robert Heintz, *Victory at High Tide*, 22. U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 15-63, "FMF Staff Memo No. 73-51," 6 June 1951, "Reporting on a visit to the Far East by CG FMFPAC and members of his staff." The Fleet Marine Force elements appear initially in the amphibious forces of the naval components [of an amphibious landing]. In the land and air battle phases, which might follow an amphibious invasion, the Marine ground units have historically been shifted to the Air Force's joint air operations control. This loss of close and direct command control over their task force air elements in joint operations is a matter of continued concern to Marine organizational planners. Under the principles of unified command of air forces, including concentration and economy of air effort at the objective area, Marine tactical support aircraft are susceptible to consolidation under the joint air component command. . . . Maintaining the organizational integrity of this unique task grouping in future joint operations under unified commands poses problems to Marine planners. . . . --James Donovan, *U. S. Marine Corps*, 106-07.

ratio of one air wing to one division engaged in combat for the purpose of CAS was more than adequate.)⁵³

Ridgway and the AF commanders who influenced him in this opinion were, in the Marine view, missing a key fact: even if every division in Korea was provided the equivalent of one Marine Air Wing in CAS support, only the 1MarDiv would use it to its potential. All of the other divisions except for the 7thID (for a time) did not even have the requisite number of TACPs to call that many air strikes, much less the training to do so, and simply directing them via Mosquito aircraft, as was standard in the other divisions, would be, if not a waste of CAS sorties, a certainly less effective application of that combat power.

(If the 1st MAW had been used solely for CAS, even for all Eighth Army, the Marines would have had fewer objections than to its being used primarily for the AF's interdiction campaign – so the *whole* of Eighth Army was being denied its CAS, not just the 1st Mar Div. Furthermore, the deliberate and strong attempts by the AF before the Korean War to absorb Naval aviation and especially all land-based air capabilities such as the Marine Corps's air components were still keenly felt by Marines at the time. They had reason to suspect that the AF cared less about the actual contribution the 1st MAW could make to interdiction than they did about keeping the Marines “in line” and possibly setting precedents for greater control over Naval and Marine aviation.)

In the Marine view, the Marine raincoat of CAS, adequate at protecting an individual, particularly the individual who had *brought* it to Korea, was now taken from it, divided into tiny scraps and spread among a whole multitude of persons where but a

⁵³ Robert F. Futrell, *USAF in Korea*, 795-796; 1MarDiv, “Report of CAS,” Letter to CG 1MarDiv, Maj. Gen. Gerald C. Thomas, from CINCUNC General Matthew B. Ridgway, 15 Oct. 1951, pages 1-2.

tiny scrap of raincoat was as effective as none at all and everybody got equally wet. The Marines insisted that the air ground team should remain a whole as the National Security Act of 1947 and subsequent amendments implied in the phrase “together with supporting air units,” and the Marines who had brought their raincoat be allowed to use it in one piece. One individual who is dry is better than a whole host that is equally wet. Why should the effectiveness of one unit be hamstrung so that it is as *equally ineffective* as those around it, said the Marines. (Perhaps Marines also thought that their own CAS was at least their due since they had been moved inland away from the customary support of NGF.)

Furthermore, Ridgway’s contention that all divisions be entirely equal in amount of CAS did not take into account the factor of terrain. Thomas’s requests specifically concerned a period of time when the 1MarDiv was in the most rugged, inhospitable portion of the entire line. There were few roads, and the ability of artillery to hit targets in such terrain was severely curtailed. Many targets could *only* be hit by air strikes. (All the conditions for using an air strike were met according to Marine doctrine.)⁵⁴ To say that the 1MarDiv division in the east near the Punchbowl, Porkchop Hill, and Heartbreak Ridge should not get more CAS than a division serving in the Seoul corridor where the terrain was relatively level and rolling was ridiculous. Furthermore, one Air Wing in the

⁵⁴ United States Navy and Marine Corps, *NAVMC-4159*, 32: “Whenever possible, however, employment of close air support should be limited to situations where one or more of the following conditions exist: (a) Artillery and naval gunfire support are not available. This includes periods when artillery units are displacing and fire support ships are maneuvering. (b) The target is beyond the effective range of artillery and naval gunfire. (c) Terrain masks the fires of artillery and naval gunfire. (d) The construction of the target is such that artillery and naval gunfire are unable to accomplish its destruction. (e) Effective attack of the target requires enfilade fires which cannot be delivered by either artillery or naval gunfire. (f) Large areas require neutralization for a period of time. (g) The target is of a general and indeterminate nature, such as large wooded areas which are suspected of concealing enemy troops or installations. (h) The target is constructed of inflammable material. (i) The target consists of inflammable vegetation which is obstructing observation or impeding the advance. (j) The target is moving rapidly away from friendly front lines. (k) The target is moving towards front lines but at sufficient distance to permit the request, assignment, and direction of support aircraft.”

Marine view *was only enough to support one division, not a whole Corps and certainly not a whole army.*⁵⁵

Besides, the 1st MAW was not even allowed to spend most of its time providing CAS period, for Eighth Army either, much less the 1st Mar Div:

The wing's operations conformed to the Fifth Air Force's grandiose interdiction plans. Only a third of Marine air strikes went to support the Eighth Army's divisions, and response time climbed from fifteen to eighty minutes for close air support missions. The 1st Marine Division received only 65 percent of the strikes it requested [and it probably requested fewer than it would have if it knew CAS was available on a reliable basis; these strikes could only be requested either in advance or under emergency situations], and only about half of those involved Marine fighter-bombers. In addition, the interdiction sorties and related "armed reconnaissance" strikes sent Marine air casualties soaring; in one two-month period, the 1st MAW lost fourteen pilots to intense Communist ground fire, a rate much higher than incurred in close air strikes. Conversely, in the heavy autumn fighting of 1951, the Fifth Air Force supplied only 96 strikes a day to the entire Eighth Army, and the 1st Marine Division received only its share.⁵⁶

But most importantly, Marines saw less than the amount of CAS they requested in a combat scenario as costing them lives. To say that they would receive a disproportionate amount only depended on how the other air power in theatre was allocated. And as a matter of note, Marines and their Navy brethren were not against interdiction, neither did they think it was less important than CAS. They simply believed CAS was *equally* important.⁵⁷

Close air support is one fundamental weapon that was all but missing from the Marine (and indeed Eighth Army) arsenal in the battle near the Punchbowl in late 1951.

⁵⁵ Thomas, Heintz, and Ageton, *The Marine Officer's Guide*, 86.

⁵⁶ Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 505; also see Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 300-301, 311-314.

⁵⁷ United States Navy and Marine Corps, *NAVMC-4159*, 6.

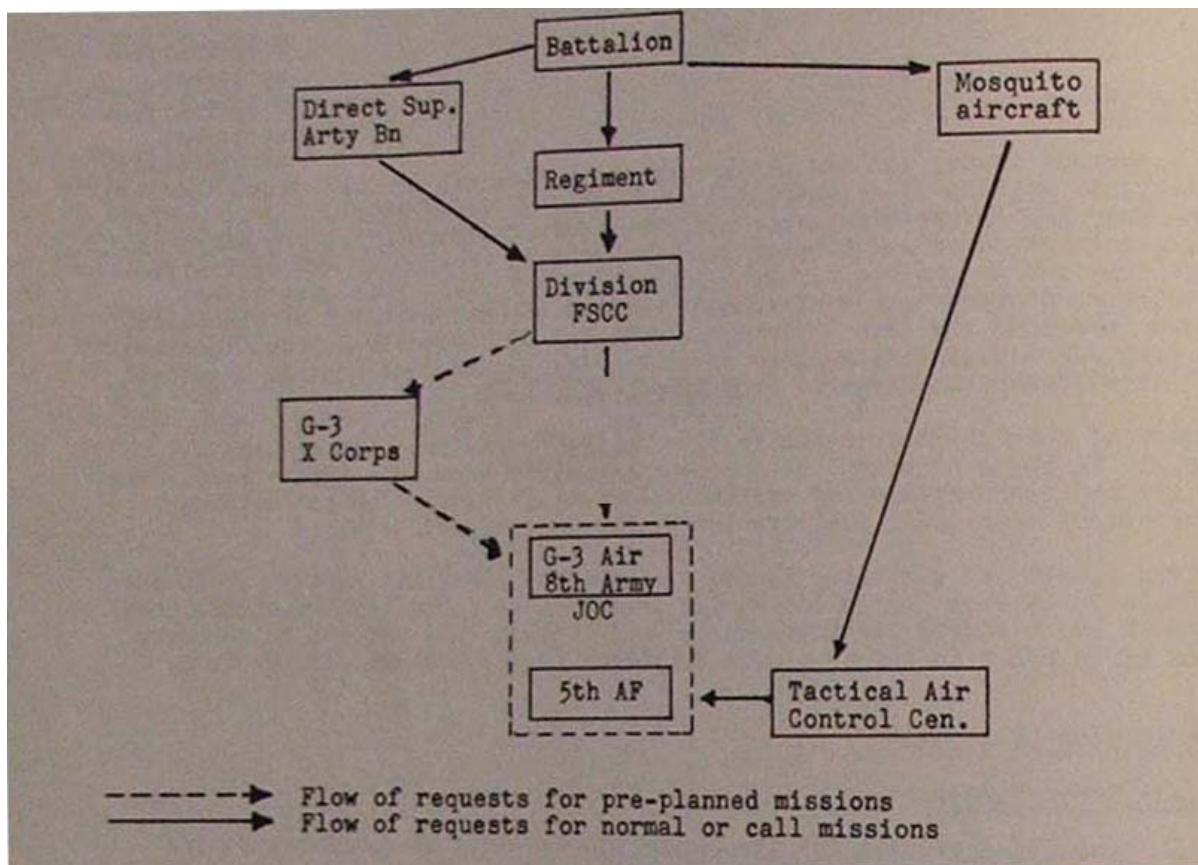


Figure 1

CAS Under the JOC

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

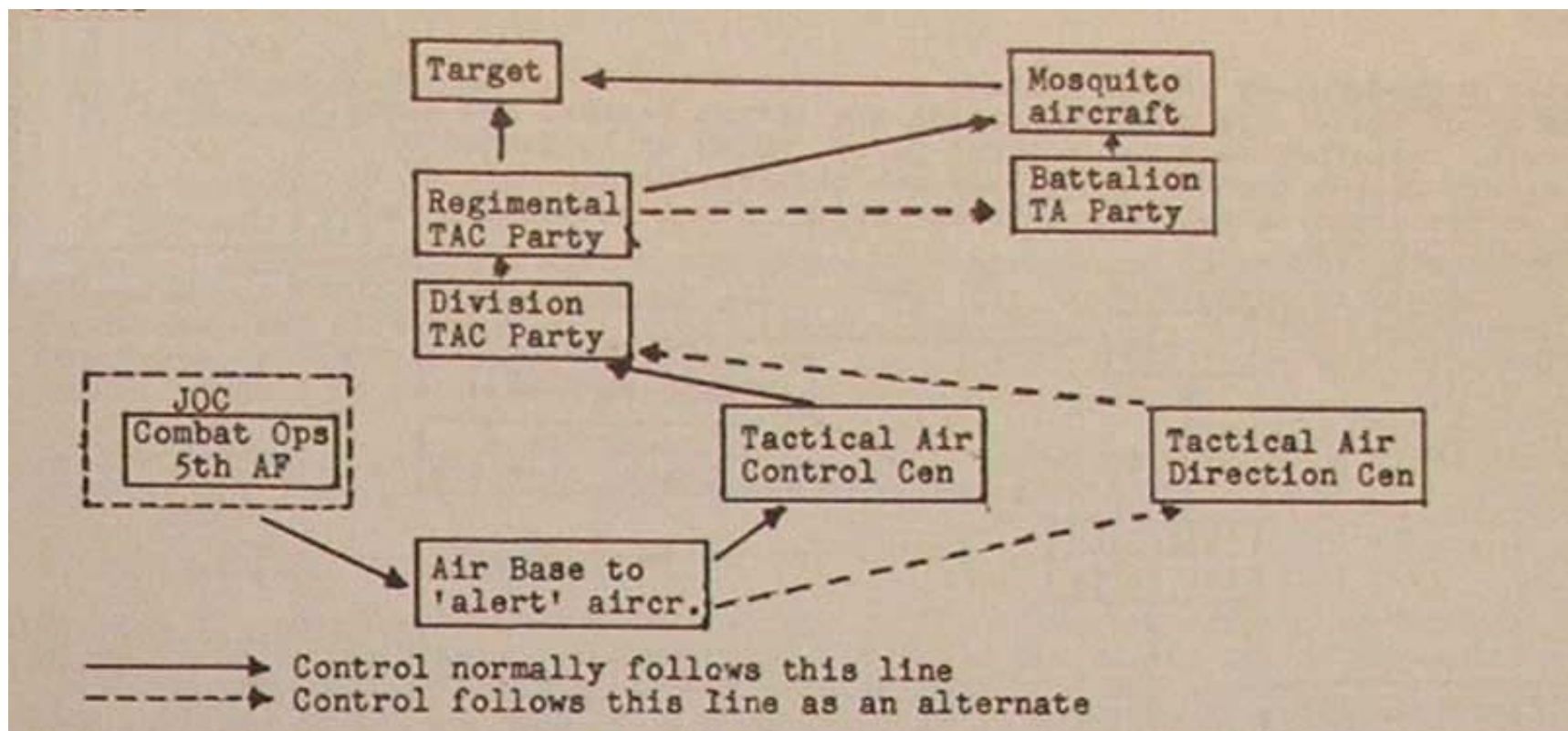


Figure 2

CAS Under the JOC

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

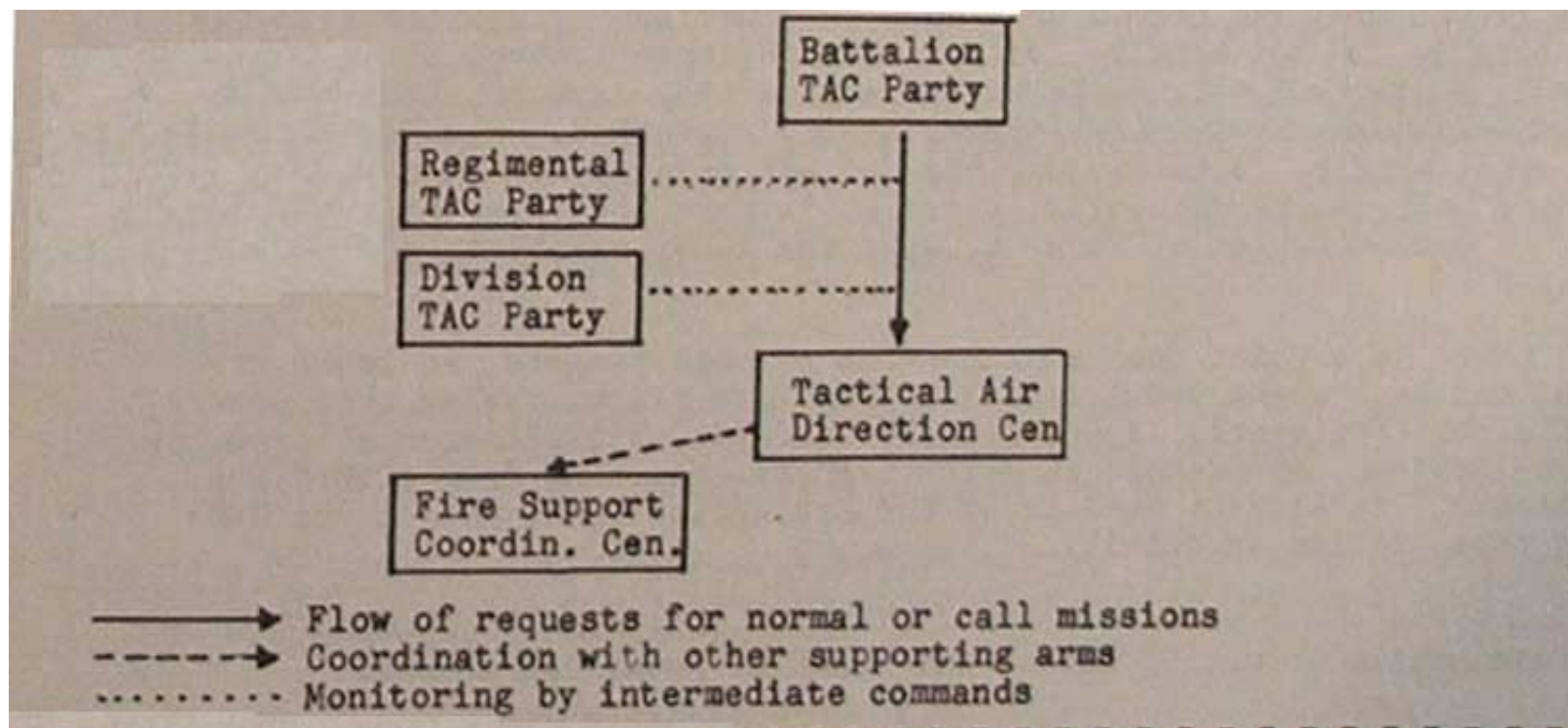


Figure 3

CAS Under the Marine System

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

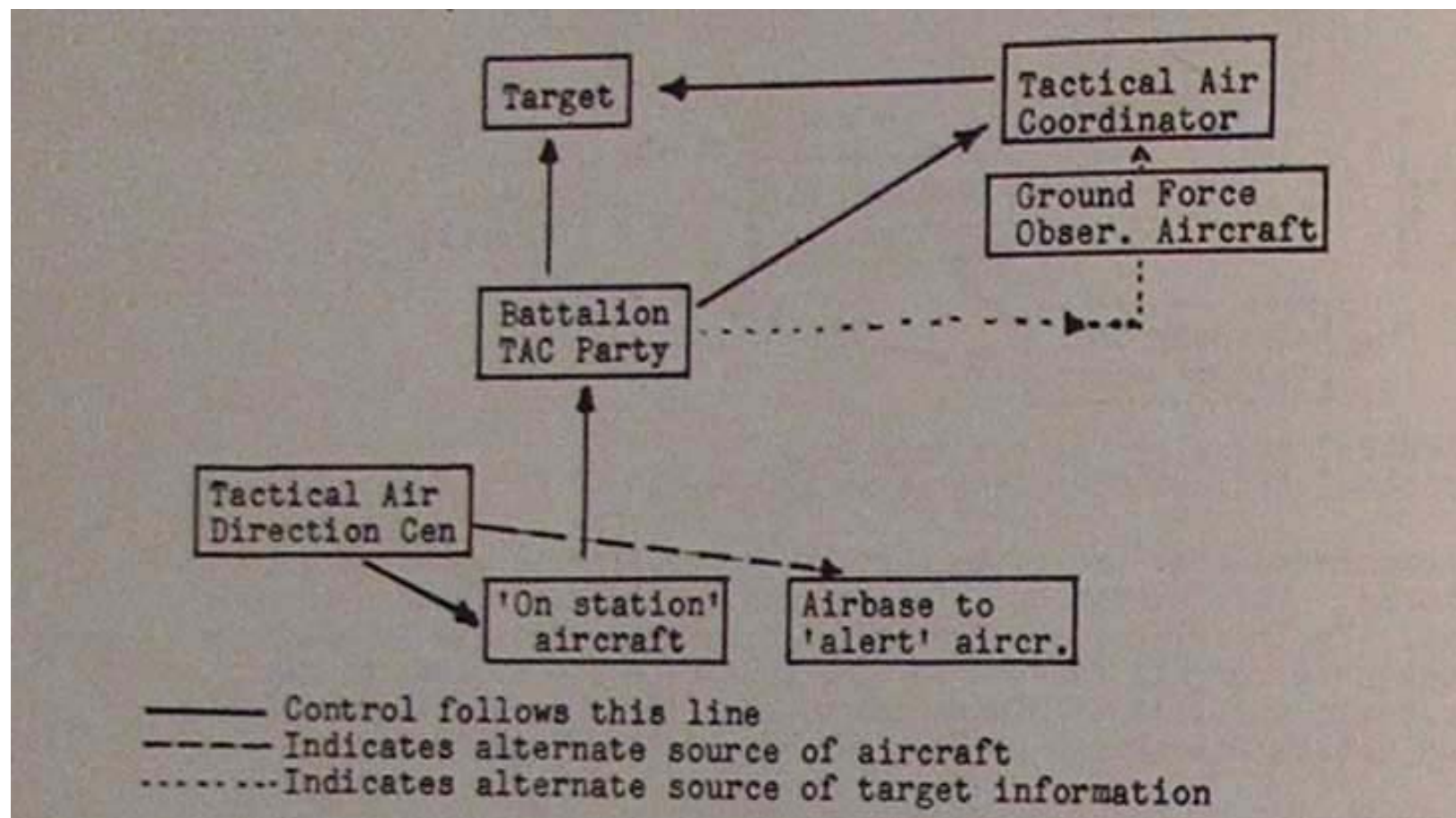


Figure 4

CAS Under Marine System

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

SORTIES REPORTED AS CLOSE AIR SUPPORT BY FORCES
MAY - DECEMBER 1951

FORCE	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
TF-77	1333	805	476	499	379	22	20	0	3534
1st MAW including CVE squadrons	1115	1247	478	443	1215	1433	1160	1022	8113
5th AF	2860	2121	1117	816	863	985	1121	300	8662
TOTALS	5308	4173	2071	1758	2457	2440	2301	1322	20,309

Figure 5

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

BREAKDOWN OF UNITS FURNISHED
CAS SORTIES BY 1ST MARINE AIR WING

	1st MARDIV	U.S. Army	ROK	British	Unknown	Total
MAY '51	252	392	70	0	401	1115
JUNE	641	280	256	0	70	1247
JULY	144	149	81	0	104	478
AUG	4	232	207	0	0	443
SEPT	386	488	184	11	146	1215
OCT	239	735	373	37	49	1433
NOV	224	422	341	111	62	1160
DEC	63	675	244	40	0	1022
TOTAL	1953	3373	1756	199	832	8113

Figure 6

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

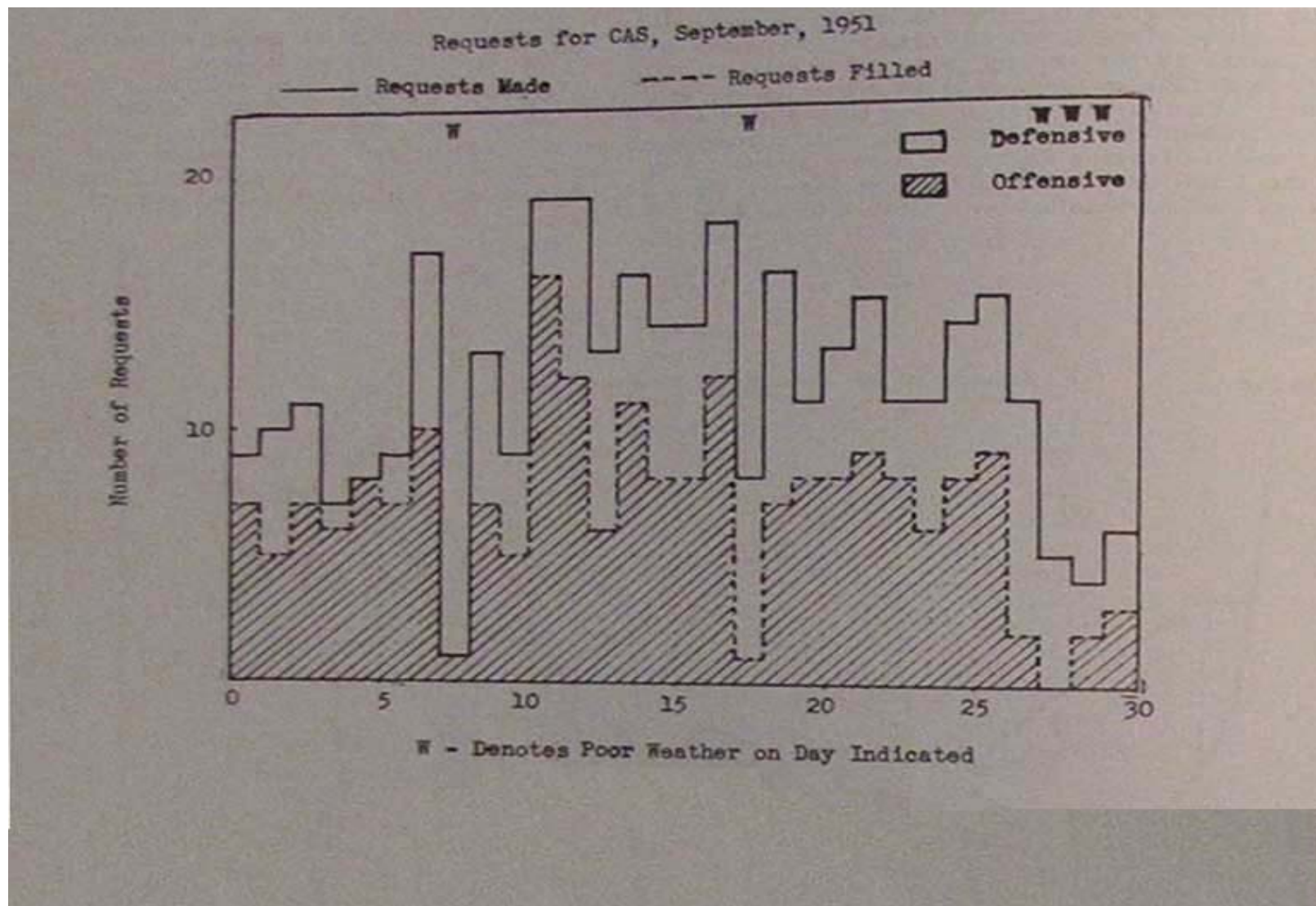


Figure 7

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

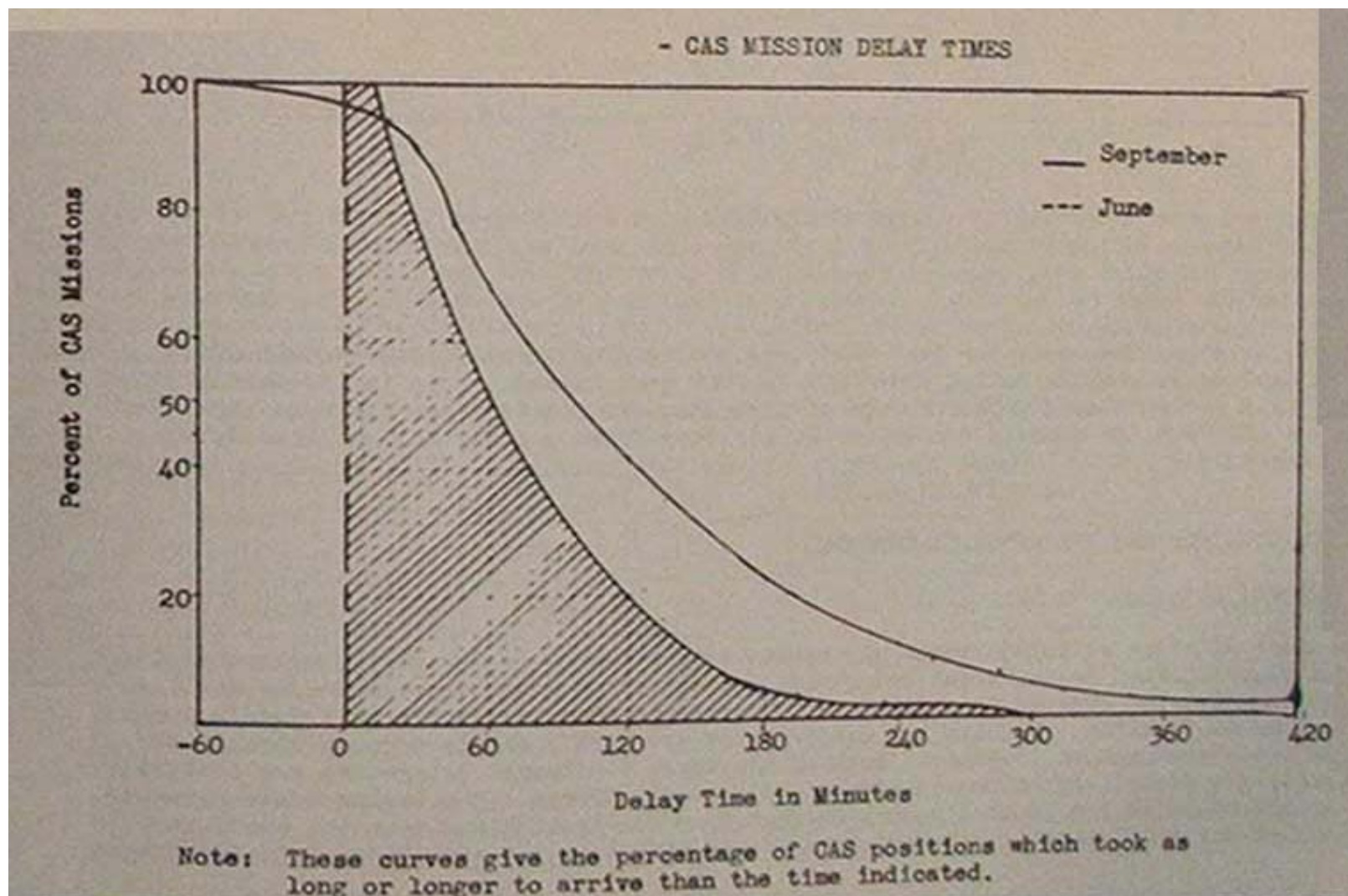


Figure 8

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

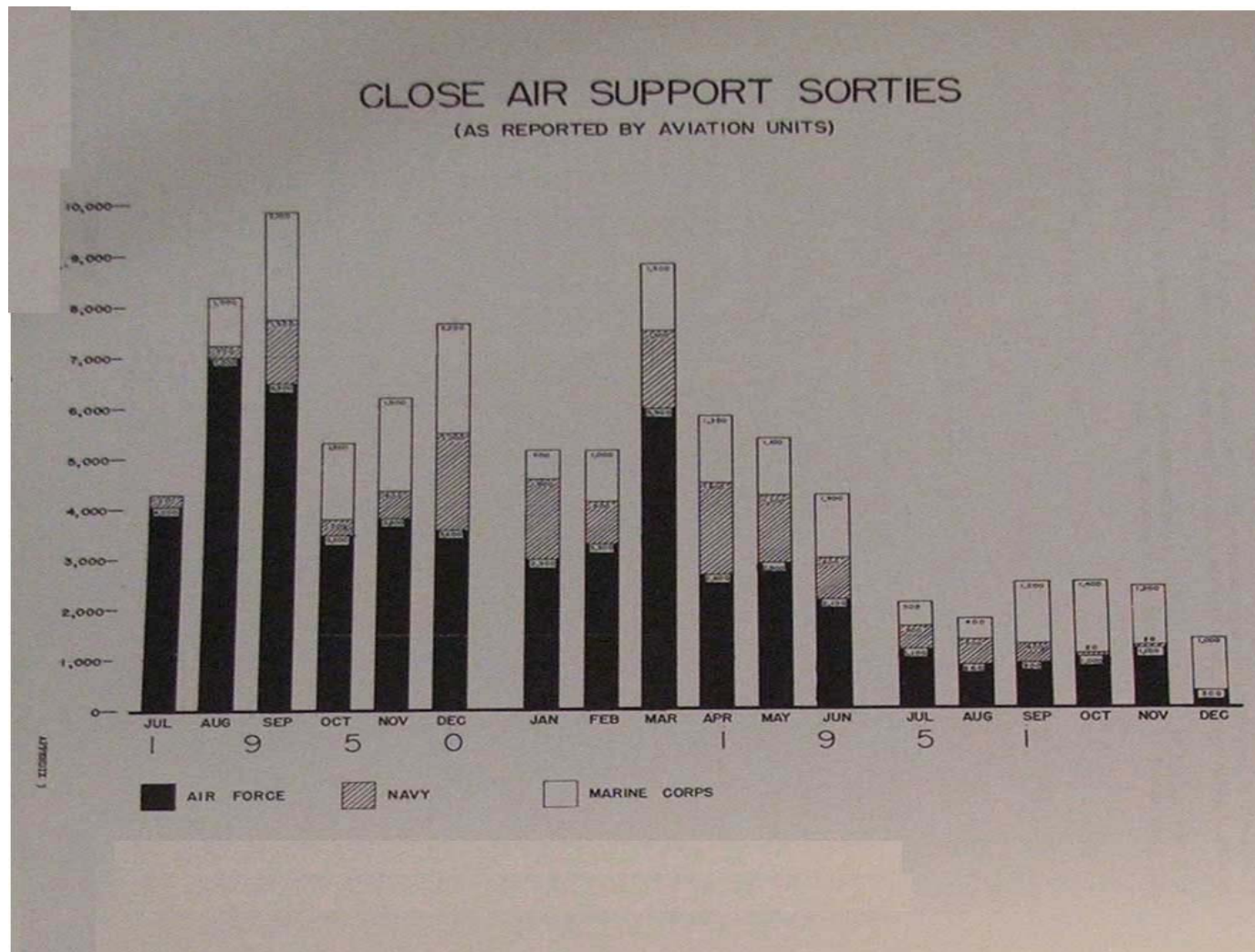


Figure 9

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

CHAPTER 12

FIRE SUPPORT COORDINATION

The Marine Corps method is to use all the fire support means which are available, to make timely use of those means, and to use them in adequate quantity in order to produce the necessary shock effect. . . . The flexibility inherent in the Marine Corps fire support coordination techniques permits the attainment of maximum effectiveness of supporting fires in any situation, a claim which has been fully born out by Marine operations in KOREA [through January 1951].

--S. L. A. Marshall

Further discussion of the Marine system of CAS in the fighting for the Punchbowl, and the control system in Korea in general, must include another crucial and fundamental portion of Marine doctrine: Fire Support Coordination.

Fire Support Coordination simply refers to the coordination (and *integration* with the fire and movement of infantry) of all available supporting arms in support of an attack or defense of an objective. The Marine Corps officially defined “Fire Support” as, “Any bombardment in support of ground troops, the term ‘bombardments’ being synonymous whether they be delivered by air, artillery or naval gunfire.”¹

Marine doctrine did not call for the use of all supporting arms for every mission. The Navy/Marine doctrine for use of supporting arms stated that, “a commander generally considers the three principal supporting arms in the following order: artillery, naval gunfire, and air.” And the idea that many in the AF had, that Marines believed in using air frequently as a substitute for artillery, was even more erroneous because

¹ United States Navy and United States Marine Corps, *PHIB-1, Amphibious Operations Definitions and Terminology*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Schools, 1946): 1.

Marine doctrine further declared that: “Generally, Air will not be used where available Artillery or Naval Gunfire can be *effectively* employed and is *adequate*. Neither Air nor Naval Gunfire will be used where available Artillery can be *effectively* employed and is *adequate*.” This quote is from USF 66, a document that, along with others in the USF series such as USF 6 and 63, delineated the official doctrine of the Navy and Marine Corps for amphibious operations.²

USF 66 goes on that the aim of fire support coordination was threefold: “(a) To obtain the maximum efficiency of firepower utilization from the supporting arms. (b) To prevent the waste of firepower. (c) To promote the safety of aircraft and ground forces.” Marines would add (to the Navy’s wording) that another aim was to achieve the maximum shock effect on an enemy target to further the progress of a ground attack or defense, thus saving infantry lives.³

To accomplish Fire Support Coordination, the Marine Corps had Fire Support Coordination Centers (FSCC) from division level up. Below the division level, i.e. regimental and battalion level, a more informal agency, the Supporting Arms Center (SAC) handled the requirements for coordination and integration on the part of the supporting arms.⁴

Governing principles of Marine Fire Support Coordination were largely developed in amphibious warfare, “however, the principles are equally applicable to purely land mass operations.” Fire Support Coordination was necessary due to factors, “such as the necessity for maintaining the momentum of attack once it is launched and

² United States Navy and Marine Corps, *NAVMC-4159*, 31; United States Navy, *USF 66, Tactical and Operational Instructions, Amphibious Forces*, (Washington, D. C.: Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1947): 11-18. Emphasis supplied.

³ United States Navy, *USF 66*, 11-18; MCBS, IV-C-2.

⁴ MCBS, IV-C-1.

adjustments of scheduled fires to make them conform to troop advance requires a flexible employment of supporting arms and a common sense approach to principles. . . . Basically, the effectiveness of fire support coordination is dependant upon adequate, reliable communications and the flexibility of supporting arms employment.”⁵

Marines were not unique in the coordination of *artillery fire* with troop movement. The Army had been doing that for decades. Marines *were* unique in the American military establishment in that, as a standard operating procedure, they superimposed NGF (naval gunfire) and CAS over the Army’s “basic structure,” greatly increasing the power of Marine supporting arms over the standard Army infantry division -- all other things being equal, and assuming that the Marines were allowed to use their supporting arms as trained to, and that they remained close enough to a coast that NGF could still support them. Army units could and did use NGF and CAS, but the liaison parties necessary to use NGF had to be specially assigned to an Army ID, and they did not often train with them. Furthermore, as has been noted above, Army divisions only had TACPs down to the regimental level, and the whole JOC system it operated under at the time of Korea was not as flexible, fast, or effective as the CAS control system of the Marines. The Marine and Army divisions had the same number of artillery organic to them: one battalion of eighteen 155mm howitzers along with three artillery battalions armed with eighteen lighter 105mm guns.⁶

Marines liked to use a generous amount of supporting fire wherever possible.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, IV-C-2; Robert Heinl, *Victory at High Tide*, 291. “The Marine Corps, habituated to hard fighting in opposed assaults, confident and knowledgeable in the Navy’s gunfire support and in the precision support of Marine and Navy aviators, believed in these weapons and liked to use them generously. Army staffs, having less experience in this type of work, hesitated to rely on the Navy’s guns in the absence of their trusted artillery, and knew little of air support as the Marines practice it.” -- Robert Heinl, *Victory at High Tide*, 56-57. The greater effectiveness of the Marine CAS system finally won out so that by the time of Vietnam, even the AF had adopted or copied it – Robert Heinl, *Victory at High Tide*, 56-57.

The Marine Corps method is to use all the fire support means which are available, to make timely use of those means, and to use them in adequate quantity in order to produce the necessary shock effect. . . . The flexibility inherent in the Marine Corps fire support coordination techniques permits the attainment of maximum effectiveness of supporting fires in any situation, a claim which has been fully born out by Marine operations in KOREA [through January 1950].⁷

What the Marine Corps Board Study on the Marine contribution to the Korean War called “the ultimate example of Marine fire support coordination,” came in the Chosin Reservoir campaign. “The many and varied operations of Marine Corps forces in Northeast Korea, some of a nature strange to Marines, vividly illustrate the dependence placed upon the coordinated fire support of aircraft and artillery. Repeatedly the effect of this fire thwarted CCF efforts to destroy 1stMarDiv and resulted in critical losses to CCF units. . . . The devastating fire of these arms was largely responsible for extricating 1stMarDiv from the Chosin Reservoir area”⁸

S. L. A. Marshall (who shall here be quoted extensively both because of the nonpartisan nature of his writing – he was an Army officer – and the pertinence of the content) described the use of such fire on the defensive in that operation thusly:

The salient note in the whole record of in-fighting during the campaign is found in the promptness and strength with which all supporting weapons were brought to bear in the decisive area of engagement whenever any part of the rifle line came under pressure by direct assault. . . .

In this, there was nothing radical or unorthodox. The defense at all points simply exploited the full advantages of the supporting weapons, using them in varying combinations so as to achieve the maximum effect, according to the manner in which the enemy attack was developing. It was war waged “according to the book” but done with such precision and power as to re-illuminate the ancient truth that weapons when correctly used will invariably bring success. The moral effects upon the defenders of these stoutly resistant “hedgehogs” were as pronounced as upon the CCF who were beaten down by the fire. It is an old and familiar story that the rifleman feels himself pretty much alone and unhelped when at close grips with the enemy. But from riflemen who manned 1stMarDiv’s

⁷ U. S. Marine Corps, “MCBS Vol. 1,” IV-C-2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV-C-3, IV-C-4.

front lines in the several perimeters came abundant testimony that they were so impressed with the power and flexibility of their supporting fires as to be “absolutely confident” of turning back the CCF attack. In vouching for the morale effect upon themselves of these systemized fires, they spoke as individuals who had survived an ordeal rather than as Marines putting in a plug for their own methods.⁹

Marshall went on to describe the method by which Fire Support Coordination worked among the Marines.

Under the system used in 1stMarDiv, the platoon and company leaders are relieved of the complex task of plotting, planning and then directing supporting fires by the heavier weapons, in preparation for, and during the course of, the fire fight. This devolves upon the SAC (Supporting Arms Center) which operates at battalion [and regimental] level[s]. Essentially the SAC coordinator is a sort of assistant S-3 in charge of the plan of fires, both in the attack and on defense. In the normal situation, he operates at the battalion OP; when in perimeter and defending all around circle, his station is at the CP, or the S-3 tent. During the organization of a defense, he accompanies the S-3 on initial reconnaissance; this gives him opportunity to familiarize himself with the front, spot the HMG's, and take note of the approaches which must be covered by artillery and mortar fire. When the reconnaissance is completed, the front lines are plotted on a situation map. The mortar and artillery officers are then told what fires to register. The actual conduct of fire is done by their FO's; when the registrations are completed, this information is relayed to the SAC and the concentrations are plotted on an overlay to the situation map. Also, when patrols move out, the SAC keeps their positions plotted so that supporting fires can be loosed quickly [and so that supporting fires do not hit the patrol]. The SAC coordinator ties in closely to the Tactical Air Control Center so that if there are targets on which his weapons are working that would also be suitable for attack by air, coordination will be immediate and complete.

1stMarDiv's battalions attribute a great measure of the effectiveness and total organization of their supporting fires to the perfecting of the SAC's operations in the course of the campaign in Korea.

The enthusiasm for the technique is general in all ranks and particularly among the line companies.¹⁰

In addition to his splendid description of the system of Fire Support Coordination among the Marines on the defense, Marshall also described it in the attack.

The main characteristic of the 1st Mar Div in the attack is the care with which it elaborates the employment and synchronization of all weapons which

⁹ *Ibid.*, IV-C-4 through IV-C-5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, IV-C-4 through IV-C-6.

will assist the rifle company or battalion to win ground at minimal cost [so much for the stereotype that Marines are headlong and blindly aggressive and waste lives].

In the typical situation, the rifle company has temporarily been brought in check by intense automatic rifle (fire) from the high ground, and the enemy deployment is such as to indicate that the line cannot continue its advance without taking excessive losses from fire coming at it from several directions.

The company then calls for mortar fire on the position, meanwhile holding its ground.

Simultaneously, or immediately following the mortar fire, artillery works over the enemy ground from which fire has been coming, as well as the ridges beyond it.

There is an air control officer with the company [probably an FAC from the battalion TACP].

A number of planes have been called in and are on station. It is arranged that as the final rounds of artillery fall, the planes will make their first strikes at these same positions.

The infantry bounds forward as the planes begin to attack, or, depending on the proximity to the CCF position, starts to advance the moment of final impact.

This is not the rare or unusual instance of coordination between 1st Mar Div's rifle components and the supporting arms in the attack.

It is the average procedure, and during operations in the north there were relatively few deviations from it. Attack after attack, by the company, battalion or regiment, was according to this same pattern.

Clear to the average rifleman was the proof that he was being helped by every agency possible.

That this conviction gave extraordinary impetus to the infantry attack would seem to be beyond question.

The multiplying of fires and the combining of flat trajectory, angle and vertical missiles no doubt resulted in the killing of more CCF than would have been done by any part of this combination acting singly.

However, the chief findings have to do with morale values, particularly those rebounding to the benefit of the attacker.¹¹

Marshall then continued with the analysis of CAS being more effective in suppressing enemy fire than artillery, quoted in the previous chapter.

As can be seen from the above excerpts, Marine Fire Support Coordination was a fundamental part of the Marine way of fighting and one that played out well in practice as well as theory -- at least when the Marines were allowed to practice their way of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV-C-5 through IV-C-7.

fighting. In September, 1951, CAS was rarely coordinated effectively with movement of troops, was unreliable, late, and inaccurate; and time and again attacks were delayed to await planes that never showed up. In the end, FSC was an essential element in Marine doctrine for effective CAS that was conspicuously absent in September, 1951, due primarily to the unwieldy nature of the JOC system and the unreliability of even pre-planned air strikes in arriving on time to further the attack. This gives some credence to General Thomas's claim that inadequate CAS cost USMC lives.

Fire Support Coordination was not always utilized by the FSCC or the SAC, however. "When we were frequently away from units higher than the company that could influence the action, the supporting arms are controlled, requested and evaluated by the company itself. That is why it is important for company commanders, potential company commanders, and platoon leaders, to learn all the capabilities and limitations about supporting arms because when the chips are down they are the ones that will ask for it."¹²

¹² Marine Corps Historical Section Interview with Captain Robert Barrow, October 8, 1951, Marine Corps Korean War document collection CD# 14, part one of interview, page 4.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSIONS

Now to summarize our offensive, though they turned down the Kojo operation [one of the Amphibious hooks planned in 1951], which with very few casualties we could have gotten some results, we had a frontal assault against one mountain range after another, just to keep pressure on the North Koreans—pressure that cost us 2,000 casualties in the 1st Mar Div.

—Lt Gen Gerald C. Thomas

September 20 marked the end of the mobile phase of the war for 1st Mar Div. “On That day the warfare of movement came to an end, and the warfare of position began.” This was the end of the final offensive the 1st Mar Div fought in Korea. “On 16 September, the Eighth Army had ordered X Corps to suspend all major offensive operations after 20 September. Van Fleet had decided that further attacks along the Hays Line could not be justified. The 1st Marine Division would now have to hold the ground it had seized, however unfinished its work.”¹

Half of Kanmubong Ridge (Hills 1052, and 980) was still in enemy hands, but there were now 4,500 more yards (beyond the Hays Line) of Korean soil behind the Minnesota Line (the Hays Line was renamed the Minnesota Line to include the real-estate taken in September, this was the new MLR). The total number of miles gained above the Kansas Line, the starting point for the offensive, was approximately ten to fifteen, depending on the location in question. Phase Two of the battle had cost the Marines almost 2,000, with 254 KIA. The entire month of September (not just phase two of the battle) wrought 2,416 total losses in 1st Mar Div (KMCs included). Casualties for

¹ Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 198; Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 310.

the month of September 1951 exceed those for every other month of the year except June. The enemy was estimated to have lost 10,442 casualties in the month of September due to action by the 1st Mar Div. The ratio of enemy losses to friendly ones was 4-to-1 in September.² (See Chart # 15)

The 1st Marines lost 69 KIA, 2 DOW (Died of Wounds), 575 WIA, and 291 NBC (non battle casualties) in September. However, 297 Marines wounded in previous actions were returned to duty, and 380 replacements were received. The regiment also captured 137 prisoners that month. Just in support of this regiment, 5,900 rounds of 4.2 inch HE mortar rounds, and 34,242 rounds of artillery were expended. Artillery in support of the 1st Marines fired 34,242 rounds for September. It was credited with killing an estimated 1,407 enemy and wounding 1,252 during the month.³

Just for 3/7 one of the battalions hardest hit, the September losses were 38 KIA, 2 DOW (died of wounds), and 325 WIA. That is a total of 365. When one considers that the unit's strength on September 1st was 1,165, (the total authorized strength for a Marine Infantry Battalion was 1,123) the percentage of losses amounts to just under 32 percent. (The battalion's full strength at the beginning of November *after* receiving replacements was still only 943 men.)⁴

On September 30, 1951, Van Fleet issued a statement informing the troops why they had been fighting that fall and to let them know the method to his strategy. He stated that the purpose of the operation had been to destroy as many enemy as

² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, 205, 213; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 5; Joseph H. Alexander, "Kanmubong Ridge," 23.

³ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 6.

⁴ Third Battalion, 7th Marines, "Historical Diary," September 1951; U. S. Marine Corps "Reference Data: Amphibious Operations," 1-6. The number 32 percent was reached by multiplying the unit's starting strength for the month (1,165) by .32 resulting in the number 372. The total casualties taken by this unit (365) is thus just under 32 percent. (To multiply by .31 brought the number 362.)

possible to save Eighth Army lives and to take out as many enemy weapons as possible, meaning artillery. He then went on to justify the high casualty numbers expended as being to keep the enemy off balance and that it “was mandatory that we control the high ground features, so that we could look down the throat of the enemy and thereby better perform our task of destruction. . . .” He summed up by saying that these losses had saved thousands of others by bettering EUSAK’s position on the terrain; that the enemy’s ability to counterattack had been crippled , and that his “hill-hopping tactics” had not destroyed the Communists but had wounded them severely.⁵

That the Eighth Army was now looking down the enemy’s throats would have been an absurdly laughable statement to the men on Hill 812, but as for the effect of hurting the Communists, they had certainly lost many men. In the Marine sector alone, the enemy had suffered: 2,799 counted KIA; 2,374 estimated KIA; 4,707 estimated WIA, and 557 POWs; a grand total of 10,442 casualties, in September 1951. For the NKPA and CCF forces that faced the 2nd ID, from late August through October, the losses were: 25,000 total; 1,473 KIA counted; 8,938 estimated KIA; 14,204 estimated WIA; and 606 POWs. In mid-September, EUSAK estimated the losses sustained by the Communists since May 1951 to total 188,237. And with those sustained by the enemy in the Fall Offensive (when it was finally finished in October) added in, that total rose to 234,000. Such numbers were probably exaggerated, but as stated by Clay Blair, “even half that would have significantly hurt the CCF and NKPA units engaged.” Total UN

⁵ EUSAK, “Command Report,” October 1951, 5-6, 29-30, and Plate 1; Lynn Montross, et al., *The East-Central Front*, 202-203.

losses for August, September, and October were 60,000, with 22,000 being from the United States.⁶

General Thomas was embittered by the order to stop the advance. He saw a halt to the offensive as “tantamount to capitulation to the Communists. . . . and the thought that such sacrifices [as made by his division] would not produce an imposed peace . . .” as very disconcerting indeed. Thomas thought an amphibious approach applied to the operations in 1951 would have been much more successful. “Now to summarize our offensive, though they turned down the Kojo operation [one of the Amphibious hooks planned in 1951], which with very few casualties we could have gotten some results, we had a frontal assault against one mountain range after another, just to keep pressure on the North Koreans—pressure that cost us 2,000 casualties in the 1st Mar Div.” That pressure, however, had helped the 2nd Infantry Division in its fights to the west.⁷

In any case, Thomas would be with the division only until December. Higher command in the UN forces may have decided that his continual agitation for better CAS was detrimental to “consensus” and a “unified attitude” in the theatre. Thomas at one point detected unsaid in a communication from Ridgway that the CINCUNC would relieve him if he could do so without causing publicity.⁸

Nevertheless, for 1st Mar Div, the rest of the war on the eastern end of the UN line would consist of digging entrenchments for the MLR and conducting limited patrols and raids forward of the defensive line. After the offensive, the Marine zone of action was

⁶ Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 950; U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 15-25; Arned Henshaw, *Heartbreak Ridge*, 127; EUSAK, “Command Report,” October 1951, 5-6, 29-30, and Plate 1; Lynn Montross, et al., *The East-Central Front*, 202-203.

⁷ Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 892-93; Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 310; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 8.

⁸ Allan R. Millett, *Many a Strife*, 313; Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 889.

enlarged considerably (by 9,000 meters, mostly eastward). “The Marines’ war—the war of movement—had ended. The war of position had begun.”⁹

The 1st Mar Div had seized all the assigned objectives it was allowed to assault. The fighting in many ways resembled “the close combat against the Japanese in World War II and the North Koreans demonstrated an ability to construct excellent defensive emplacements and bunkers, and conduct a determined defense of every piece of commanding ground.” And though this fight was not touted in the media as were those of September, 1950, the division received yet another Presidential Unit Citation for its actions, the same award it had received for those of 1950.¹⁰

This citation commended the division for “extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in Korea during the periods 21 to 26 April, 16 May to 30 June, and 11 to 25 September 1951.”¹¹

For the last period listed, the citation stated:

In the final significant offensive of the action in Korea . . . the First Marine Division, Reinforced, completed the destruction of the enemy forces in Eastern Korea by advancing the front against a final desperate defense in the ‘Punch Bowl’ area in heavy action which completed the liberation of South Korea in this locality. With the enemy’s major defenses reduced, his forces on the central front decimated, and the advantage of terrain and the tactical initiative passing to friendly forces, he never again recovered sufficiently to resume the offensive in Korea. The outstanding courage, resourcefulness and aggressive fighting spirit of the officers and men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, reflect the highest credit upon themselves and the United States Naval Service.¹²

The assessment of the citation on the end-state of the offensive in Korea was wishful thinking of the first order, on the part of the Truman Administration. The enemy

⁹ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 276; 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3.

¹⁰ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 2; Major Gerald P. Averill, “Final Objective,” 10-16; Allan R. Millett, *Drive North*, 62.

¹¹ This citation is included in full as an appendix to Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*.

¹² Lynn Montross, *et al.*, *The East-Central Front*, Appendix D.

was not destroyed in the area. He still had major defenses just a few miles from the front lines and only yards away in some cases, and he certainly had the capacity to resume the offensive later (he even did so in some sectors). In addition, the tactical initiative was lost to the enemy when the decision not to resume the offensive was made. Nevertheless, the 1st Marine Division did not make policy, and it carried out the orders it received in a manner well worthy of the credit bestowed upon it by the President and left the NKPA and the CCF with a great respect for the “yellow legs” (called thus because of their leggings) division in Korea.¹³

The fighting had been very intense. “The resistance was characterized by the enemy’s willingness to fight for every bunker and his dogged determination in the face of heavy artillery and mortar fire supplemented by air strikes on his most heavily fortified positions. Close-in fighting decided the issue on every hill.” But even with the high casualties and bitter fighting, the morale of the 1st Mar Div remained high.¹⁴

Spike Selmyhr remembered the division fondly: “never in my lifetime would I serve with such a splendid group of men (warriors) who, to a man, would lay down their lives for one another.” And, “the battle of September 13, 1951 stands out in my mind after all these years because of the absolute skill, courage, and willingness of my Marines to close with the enemy.”¹⁵

The view of many Marines that the enemy fought as fiercely as the Japanese in World War II was correct in that the NKPA were harsh in their discipline and expected their men to fight to the last, but their ideology was not as strong among the soldiers

¹³ Jack L. Cannon, “Attack on Hills 673 and 749,” 24.

¹⁴ 1st Mar Div, “Historical Diary,” September 1951, 3-4.

¹⁵ Interview Transcript, Garlen L. “Spike” Selmyhr, 2000.

that almost no one surrendered, as among the Japanese. Prisoners were both taken through the campaign in action, and from voluntary surrender.

Selmyhr recalled:

About 0900 [on 13 September], Lieutenant Connolly, the Company commander, and Lieutenants Marsh, Morton and I made a reconnaissance of the area we would attack. We spotted a group of enemy moving along the ridge line above us. Suddenly two enemy soldiers came out of the bush with their hands in the air, waving surrender leaflets. Because of the enemy on the ridgeline, Lieutenant Morton and I motioned with our .45 pistols for them to move back against a bank so we would not be observed by their friends on the ridge line. . They sort of went hysterical in the probable belief that they were about to be shot. They got down on their knees and drew diagrams of the positions where their comrades were. They said there were “many, many machine guns.” Were they ever correct!¹⁶

POWs taken from the enemy were often very cooperative and useful in determining intelligence about the enemy. Unlike the Americans, the Communists believed that their lower ranks would be inspired by knowing many details about the plans of their leaders.

Three veteran NKPA who surrendered to the 7th Marines told their capturers why they had voluntarily given up. Their platoon had been part of an assault force that threw themselves four times against Marine defenders on the summit of a hill. All four times they had been decimated with severe losses. At the last muster, their platoon numbered only three. By mutual agreement, the three soldiers marched their platoon leader into the woods, killed him, and surrendered to mortar men from the 7th Marines.¹⁷

The Communist enemy also utilized formidable tactics based on sound training and much experience. Said a EUSAK report:

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Undated Public Information Document with no Author Named, National Archives: RG 127, Records of the U. S. Marine Corps, “Division of Information, Publicity Articles Relating to the First Marine Division in Korea, Final Copies, Oct. 1950-Feb. 1952.”

Enemy tactics were sound and well-executed. Contrary to the popular conception of the enemy as “a screaming horde,” the NK and CC Forces were well-coordinated fighting machines. Enemy attacks showed considerable prior planning and good judgment for the most part.

. . . Tactics employed were similar to Western tactics; especially, the old Patton adage of “holding them by the nose and kicking them in the pants.” Envelopments were widely used. It is believed that air superiority, fire-power, and mobility of the UN Forces provided the difference between the two forces.

Defensively, the enemy used the same tactics, on the whole, as UN Forces; namely, that of trading terrain in an effort to gain time and inflict maximum losses on the opposition.¹⁸

Communist soldiers did not get to rotate home after a few months on the line like the Americans did. They either fought and survived, or they died, so those who were veterans had much experience to draw on. The NKPA was known for outstanding camouflage discipline, brought on as a necessity to avoid being spotted from the air. Both his positions and his personnel were very difficult to see if not silhouetted by a skyline, or in some other manner breaching that camouflage discipline. “They have been forced to perfect this skill as a direct result of a lack of air support.”¹⁹

The NKPA enemy used counterattacks extensively and according to his doctrine. “North Korean defensive doctrine holds that only a well-timed and determined counterattack can achieve eventual victory in a defensive situation. Commanders of smaller subordinate units are therefore encouraged to launch continuous small-scale counterattacks against penetrations in their sector. . . .” The counterattacks were “an integral part of their defensive system and were used for various purposes: (1) to blunt

¹⁸ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 128.

¹⁹ U. S. IX Corps, “Enemy Tactics, Techniques, and Doctrine,” 6.

the edge of a United Nations assault; (2) to annihilate a portion of the hostile force; and (3) to recapture a lost position.”²⁰

Usually, these were at night to counter the UN advantage of air support. Early in the war, too many Communist troop formations had been decimated in daylight by air strikes. The Marines, like the rest of the UN forces, favored daylight attacks to maximize the effectiveness of their air support. The NKPA differed from the CCF in its use of night attacks in that it preferred the blackest of nights for attack where the CCF favored the light of a full moon. Thus was the night of greatest illumination in this battle also one of the quietest in terms of enemy activity.²¹

The method of an NKPA night attack followed this SOP (standard operating procedure):

- (1) Soldiers to participate in the night attack are selected by the officers assigned the mission of launching the attack. Particular emphasis is placed on strength, health and character in the selection of the men.
- (2) During the day the soldiers are told of the attack scheduled for that night and are given an opportunity to rest and sleep. Two hours prior to departure time the men are awakened.
- (3) The men are oriented on the route and method of approach to enemy positions, and the special password and signals to be used during the attack. After thorough study of the area, the assembly point for use after the attack is selected.
- (4) The approach to the attack area is through defiles, valleys, and along little-used trails with the troops in a single file formation—10 yards between men. When a point is reached some 100-200 yards from the UN positions, the attacking force deploys. After each man is positioned, the attackers crawl to within 50 yards of enemy lines. The first shot, fired by the leader, is the signal for all the men to charge and open fire on the UN forces. Each man is equipped with the PPSH [burp gun] sub-machine gun. Heavy and light machine guns are employed to assist a withdrawal in the even the attack fails.
- (5) The attack will usually take place at 0400 hours and seldom on moonlight nights.

²⁰ Headquarters Far East Command, Military Intelligence Section, General Staff, “Interrogation Reports: North Korean Defensive Tactics,” February 1951, (U. S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA): 19; Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 62.

²¹ Headquarters Far East Command, “North Korean Defensive Tactics,” 19.

- (6) Reports have been received that North Korean troops carry wooden clappers for deception purposes to simulate gun fire and at the same time preserve ammunition.
- (7) Local civilians are employed to spy on the enemy and obtain information concerning the terrain over which the attack will take place.²²

There were other elements characteristic of an NKPA attack:

The enemy deployed in depth and employed numerous waves of troops depending on the formation of the United Nations defensive positions. As a rule, too much strength was not concentrated in the spearhead of the attack. The terrain determined the number of men used. If the leading element failed to break through United Nations lines, a second and third wave were used until a breakthrough was established. . . .²³

The UN forces, the Marines among them, adopted “defense perimeters in depth, with physical contact between units and prearranged fields of fire.” These “prevented enemy patrols from determining friendly boundaries.” Also, “rigid control of fire . . . denied the enemy this information. Only troops immediately to the front of the enemy’s probing action fired on him. Friendly flank elements held fire except in the face of a sizeable enemy attack.” Another report described the UN preventive measure similarly as “a tight perimeter in depth, together with coordination of fire between units, permitted the United Nations units to withstand and repel enemy counterattacks.”²⁴

The enemy’s defensive layout, too, followed his doctrine. NKPA defensive lines followed this basic structure. An “outpost line” of defense was “located 6 to 8 miles in front of the main line of resistance . . . and is designed to harass and delay the hostile attack. Comprised of hasty positions manned by forward detachments, this defensive belt allegedly may be omitted entirely at the discretion of the senior commander.” Either

²² U. S. IX Corps, “Enemy Tactics, Techniques, and Doctrine,” 20-21.

²³ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 39.

²⁴ Headquarters Far East Command, “North Korean Defensive Tactics,” 32; Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 84.

This line was dissolved by the attack of the U. S. 2nd Infantry Division and 8th ROK Division before the Marines came up to relieve them, or the commander had omitted it entirely in front of Yoke Ridge. Between the Outpost Line and the MLR was a "Security Line." It was usually about 1 ½ miles in front of the MLR. "This line is said to be comprised of individual strongpoints, protected by a system of obstacles, and receives fire support from the main line of resistance. The security line is allegedly designed to prevent surprise attacks and to act as a reconnaissance screen. It reaches its greatest depth and strength in front of the main position." Yoke Ridge could have been the Security Line for the MLR, Kanmubong Ridge.²⁵

The enemy MLR "has a depth of 3 to 4 miles and is divided into regimental and battalion sectors which consist of a number of strong-points which, protected by obstacles, afford all around defense even when isolated." Kanmubong Ridge was probably part of the NKPA MLR, constructed as it was for deliberate and unyielding defense with so many mines, and bunkers with interlocking fields of fire. In addition, the reverse slopes had many deep emplacements for the enemy to live in and survive strong artillery attack. When artillery preparation was lifted, they would swarm out of the reverse slope bunkers and man their fighting positions on the forward military crest.²⁶

There were weaknesses in the enemy's tactical methods as well. In carrying out his orders, an NKPA commander was given very little leeway or discretion. "While North Korean defensive doctrine, outlined in captured enemy documents, clearly reflects its Soviet origin, this analogy cannot be carried too far, as field conditions imposed certain modifications on the enemy's defensive pattern. Nonetheless, PW [POW] reports

²⁵ Headquarters Far East Command, "North Korean Defensive Tactics," 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

indicate that in the North Korean as in the Soviet Army the lack of flexibility granted individual commanders, particularly at lower levels, has predicated an adherence to certain preconceived tactical dispositions and maneuvers.”²⁷

The Communist attack doctrine, as observed in all major enemy attacks in Korea, was inflexible. [The same was true of NKPA defensive doctrine since only the senior commander could order a withdrawal.] Subordinate units were not permitted to make adjustments which terrain, friendly defenses or other factors might have indicated as being desirable. . . . Preparations for an attack followed an inflexible and unvarying pattern which soon became apparent to friendly forces. And finally, enemy insistence, due to inflexibility, on mass employment tactics proved costly in the face of United Nations air and artillery fire.²⁸

Furthermore, there was no tolerance for failure, and draconian discipline enforced the rigid will of senior command. “It is a characteristic feature of North Korean Military doctrine that a commander is expected to accomplish his mission even under the most adverse circumstances. . . .” The subordinate commander was also responsible for everything that happened under his command. “According to a captured field order, unit commanders are held personally responsible, not only for the adequacy of defense plans, particularly as regards preparation of the ground, but also for the implementation of these plans.”²⁹

North Korean officers and troops alike are directed to hold their ground at all cost unless ordered to retreat by competent authority and are instructed to commit suicide rather than surrender to United Nations Forces. To persuasive propaganda depicting UN troops as barbaric murderers who kill all prisoners was added the direct threat of execution to hold down the desertion rate and prevent retreat, notably among the demoralized and ill-trained replacements conscripted south of the 38th Parallel. Many prisoners relate that their squad and platoon leaders brandished a pistol and threatened to kill them should they attempt to surrender. Others purport that in combat units composed overwhelmingly of recent ROK draftees, special guards were posted right behind the forward echelon of troops with explicit orders to shoot all deserters. Unit cultural officers, too, seem to play an important role in preventing desertion; they collect surrender

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 73.

²⁹ Headquarters Far East Command, “North Korean Defensive Tactics,” 4, 5.

leaflets immediately after they are dropped and mete out sever punishment to all personnel found in possession of such a document.³⁰

The primary enemy disadvantage was in morale. The Marines had high morale while the enemy's was very poor. Indications of the low enemy morale was the willingness of NKPA soldiers to surrender if out from under the vindictive eye of their officers long enough to do so with out being executed, and that the prisoners taken by the Marines often told of the poor and inadequate food they had. In addition, "the capture of many enemy troops suffering from old wounds indicated that Communist medical support was limited," a fact corroborated by Marine intelligence summaries. Another SOP followed by the enemy forces undoubtedly contributed to their low morale, though it maintained the maximum application of available manpower for firing weapons. No NKPA was to receive medical attention while a firefight was still going on. All personnel were to be fighting. Medical care was for after the combat was over.³¹

The enemy clearly did not have the manpower to expend on the heavy, bloody counterattacks he launched against Marine positions time and time again. This broke the back of the NKPA forces defending Kanmubong Ridge. Like the Marines in World War II used to say about the Japanese, "when they Banzai, that's when we break their backs," the relentless counterattacks of the NKPA broke their strength.

These attacks were not as suicidal and headlong as a Japanese Banzai charge, however. They were launched with ample preparation, and retreat would be sounded after a culminating point was reached with no penetration. In addition, the enemy often had "waves" of reserves ready to exploit any penetration made by a previous wave. And "the enemy counterattack did not extend beyond the limit of frontal supporting fire, and

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹ Headquarters EUSAK, "Enemy Tactics," 129.

when a position was taken, the enemy main body dispersed to the flanks to avoid UN artillery fire.” Furthermore, these attacks were not a last gasp, a desperate and futile attempt to inflict casualties and preserve honor in a final glorious attack like the Banzai charges were. They were deliberate, carefully planned, and intended to succeed.³²

In fact, in many cases throughout the Korean War, these tactics *did* succeed against UN forces, particularly earlier in the war or against ROKs, causing many mass “bug-outs,” with the UN troops falling back or out-right breaking and running from the enemy onslaught. The experience of a black night suddenly filled with shrieking whistles and bugles, and screaming, charging men was enough to freeze the blood even of the brave. The NKPA tactics were intended to strike fear into the heart of the enemy and cause him to flee, or to be so demoralized that he could not repulse the attack. The fight on Hill 812 is an example of how these tactics almost succeeded.

Nevertheless, the enemy had not the resources to maintain such a manpower-intensive method of fighting, at least the NKPA did not. Their Chinese brethren could have kept a steady flow of troops for years and years yet at the same rate of attrition without being bled dry, but the North Koreans hardly had the manpower of vast China in the tiny section of Korea it held. “It was also probable that, during the latter stages of the Korean Conflict, North Korean troops realized they were fighting for their homeland and would not trade space for time. The armistice talks no doubt influenced the Communist armies to resort to a stubborn defense line.”³³

³² *Ibid.*, 83.

³³ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 75.

On why the enemy was reluctant to give up ground, and probably why he decided to return to negotiating (since he was not succeeding in repulsing UN attacks and was losing ground) a EUSAK report speculated:

When the enemy reached the 38° Parallel, he could not afford to “lose face” by sacrificing territory of the homeland of the North Korean people. To do so, he may have felt, would cause loss of respect of the North Korean people and possibly of the entire oriental world.

In view of a possible armistice, to permit sections of North Korea to fall into United Nations hands would have given UN delegates a weapon in negotiation. Furthermore, forcing the UN troops to halt at the 38° Parallel would have enabled the Communist world to retain its “iron curtain” in Korea.

Probably the most logical reason for the change to stubborn defense tactics [as opposed to trading space for time] was . . . because of friendly air and artillery, [he had to resort] to attempts to annihilate small friendly units [as opposed to isolating and destroying larger ones]. This tactic was more effective when the MLR in defense was employed. . . .³⁴

UN forces used the following basic process as SOP to overcome enemy defenses:

In a typical assault on an enemy defensive position, air and artillery were first used in the softening up process. Aerial bombs weighing 250 and 500 pounds, with a 10-second delay nose and tail fusing, proved effective on enemy fortifications provided a direct hit was scored. Aerial bombardment was restricted due to the lack of required precision bombing [or CAS, which could actually achieve a precision hit as opposed to the area “precision” of the AF]. On an average, one bunker was destroyed out of eight bomb drops on positively identified targets. This average decreased in adverse weather or because of poor target identification. Field commanders felt that three fighter-bombers, utilizing 250-pound bombs was required for each bunker.

. . . [Concerning artillery] it was proven that a direct hit by a 155mm shell was effective on enemy pillbox with 5-foot protective roof; a direct hit with 105mm shell was effective on one with a 3-foot protective roof. The best artillery support was provided by the direct fire of a 155mm gun, although high angle fire from heavy artillery also proved effective. . . .

When artillery fire was lifted, 4.2mm and 82mm mortars pounded the enemy positions at three-minute intervals as the assaulting force moved up. Tanks moved forward of the infantry in the final assault and tried to close within a range less than 1000 yards to fire on the enemy bunkers. A range of 300 to 400 yards was preferred. . . .³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁵ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 108.

After the softening up, the attack would proceed for the Marine forces in the manner described by S. L. A. Marshall in the previous chapter, but considering the harsh terrain, with slower speed. Wherever possible, the Marines probably used this process to actually eliminate bunkers:

The infantry used assault teams consisting of one rifle squad, two flame throwers, one demolition team, . . . one 75mm recoilless rifle squad, and one light machine gun squad, or a total of 26 men.

The teams deployed with the 75mm recoilless rifle squad placing fire on the apertures of the enemy bunker at a range of about 600 yards. The light machine gun squads deployed to the flanks to support the attack. The rifle squad, together with the two flame throwers, closed in as far as possible and placed small arms and BAR fire on the bunker. The flame throwers then moved forward until 35 yards from the enemy position and engaged the bunker with fire while the demolition team planted the explosive charges. When the positions was neutralized, the team hastily reorganized and prepared to move forward . . . [to do it all over again].³⁶

Tactics aside, there are other conclusions about this battle in the way of problems hindering the Marines. Close Air Support, or the rather the lack of it in the September fighting exacerbated the issue in the minds of Marines. In the half month of battle in September 1951, 182 requests were made by FACs in the Marine division for CAS. For 127 of the requests, planes did arrive, but only twenty four of them arrived when they were still needed for the purpose initially requested. It usually took over two hours for planes to arrive in response to a request. The tactical situation (mostly terrain and weather) had severely limited the division in its maneuvers. General Thomas believed that more adequate CAS would have saved many of the 2,416 casualties taken in September.³⁷

“A fatal defect in the Air Force/Army system as used in Korea was usual failure even to acknowledge an advance request for close air support sorties. Not knowing

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁷ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” chapter 9.

what action was being taken on his request, the commander of the Division could not rely on air support in planned operations.” General Thomas told General Frank Everest, commander of FAF, “As a division commander, in order to make an attack, and I know exactly what I have got to do with tomorrow morning in my own division – I’ve got artillery, supporting weapons and all – but you ask me to go into an attack and I don’t know what weapons I’m going to have, I don’t know what planes I’m going to have to support me until JOC tells me tomorrow morning what the hell’s coming up . . . I simply can’t plan operations on that basis.”³⁸

Furthermore, the planes that did arrive, when not Marine aviators, had no clue how to deliver CAS. A flight of ten New Zealand planes was sent in one day, and they dropped their ordnance on friendly lines. The Marines told them to go home. To them, no support at all was better than that kind of sloppiness. Thomas did some research about that particular day, and found that JOC had given the 1st MAW sorties that day to an ROK division, and the Marines the New Zealanders even though the 1st MAW air field was only fifteen miles away.³⁹

In fairness to the Air Force, however, it should be pointed out that an air war of interdiction was not exactly the war it would have preferred to fight, either. Its doctrine mandated the destruction of the enemy’s capacity to wage war by attacking his production centers, but since these were mostly located in China in 1951, they could not be attacked unless Truman decided to expand the war, something he was absolutely against, as the wrangle with MacArthur and his firing shows.⁴⁰

³⁸ U. S. Pacific Fleet, “Third Interim Evaluation Report,” 1-13; Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 890.

³⁹ Gerald C. Thomas Oral Memoir, 888.

⁴⁰ Conrad C. Crane, *American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000): Introduction.

Another problem was limits from EUSAK on the amount of ammunition that could be expended. The shortage of ammunition at the front is one probable reason. Though these limits were obviated in an emergency, the pre H-hour bombardments and other uses of artillery were not as generous as might otherwise be the case.⁴¹

Logistical support for the division was mostly from the same sources as other U. S. divisions in Korea. And, "logistically the Division maintained a high degree of material preparedness for an amphibious operation or whatever assignment it was called upon to perform."⁴²

Like the attacks of the 2nd ID to the west, the attacking units were fed somewhat piecemeal into the grinder. However, the 1st Mar Div had no choice in the matter since its commitments to defend the Kansas Line and to keep the 1st Marines in corps reserve tied up more than half its offensive power. But this situation would soon change as the 1st Marines were released from reserve and the 5th Marines from responsibility on Line Kansas. However, at no time in the Punchbowl Offensive for the 1 Mar Div were more than two regiments engaged simultaneously. Besides, by the time the 1st Marines was finally at the front, the 7th Marines and KMC Regiment both had already been chewed up and would have been necessarily kept in reserve anyway, so either way, the use of the division in a divided manner curtailed its strength.

But then again, considering the difficult terrain, it may be that no more than two regiments *could* have been committed even if the commanding general had had them available and so desired to use them. This certainly seems plausible given the logistical difficulties of operating in the area. Furthermore, the *reason* the 1st Marines was in corps

⁴¹ 1st Marine Regiment, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 11; 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, directives received.

⁴² 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4.

reserve was for the purpose (though vetoed by higher HQ) of conducting an amphibious “end run,” something the Marines would have pulled men away to participate in even if only a single private was left to defend a regimental sector. In any case, as part of X Corps, the division certainly had to, and rightly so, come to the aide of its embattled fellow UN divisions. And while the CG 1 Mar Div chose the CAS issue as the cause for the high casualties suffered by his Marines, perhaps the divided attention of the division between defensive and offensive mission mandated by orders and decisions from higher commands, is partly to blame. But how could that have been alleviated unless the Truman Administration had authorized and sent more troops to Korea?⁴³

Marines were not above mistakes and not all Marines adhered to the ideals of the Corps. For instance, some Marine officers did not follow Spike Selmyhr and Gerald Averill’s examples, and the Marine ideal, of leading from the front.

One Marine of Fox 2/7 shot himself in the hand in order to get out of combat. Averill remarked: “The weak are always there, in small numbers but ever present, and others must carry their loads. The strong had survived that night, had stood fast, had changed the enemy assault from certain victory into a rout. The lessons learned so well in other battles, in other places, were borne out once again. Look after your men, and they will look after you.” Though small numbers of Marines proved “weak,” the strength

⁴³ Let not the reader misinterpret the argument to infer that the Marine Corps was not a part of the U. S. fighting forces. This is not the case at all. The Marine Corps was every bit as much a part as any other service was. In the case of 1951, the Marine division in Korea was set to the same task as Army divisions under Army command when according to its doctrine it was to operate under Naval command for primarily amphibious operations. However, as Gen Thomas told General Almond when questioned on a rumor that he had said the corps commander could go to hell: “I will execute any order it is proper for a soldier to receive.” *The 1 Mar Div, even when fighting for better CAS, never at any point considered itself out of subordination to EUSAK or its corps commander*, its correspondence on the subject up the chain of command always stated that it was not unwilling or less than immediately ready to execute the orders and tasks given it to the fullest degree. The Marines in Korea had envisioned a different use for their forces, but never at any point saw themselves as insubordinate, or the mission currently engaged-in, as beneath them to perform. They pursued these with every bit as much vigor as the Army divisions on the line with them. See the quote from General Thomas at the beginning of Chapter on CAS.

of the others held true; some bad-eggs have probably existed in every unit that has ever marched in war.⁴⁴

And Averill's assessment, mentioned earlier, that it was a mistake not to take Hills 1052 and 980 certainly seems correct in light of the fact that many casualties were taken from those heights after the Marines had ceased advancing, and many more would be taken from them all through the winter with EUSAK on the defensive line. It seems that Hill 812 was one bad place to try and set up a permanent defensive MLR.

One thing this battle illustrates about warfare in general is that combat against prepared defenses almost always comes down to hard infantry combat on the platoon and company levels, which requires the elimination of each bunker, pillbox, trench, and fighting hole one by one and with rifles and grenades in the majority of cases and at heavy cost. "In spite of excellent artillery, air, and the support of other weapons, the infantrymen had to finally close and dislodge the stubborn foe." The paucity of CAS aside, this would still have been the case with as much and as accurate an amount of supporting fire from all arms as a commander could dream to have. Combat to take fortified, mutually supporting, enemy positions in defensible terrain is brutal, bitter, bloody, and heartbreakingly costly whether that terrain be in Italy or the Pacific of World War II, the trenches of the late Civil War and World War I, the NVA-manned hills of Vietnam, the mountains of Afghanistan, or the death-trapped houses of Fallujah, Iraq. In every case, push-button, "easy" warfare, low on casualties and high on monetary price, is proven to be what is obsolete not the infantryman. (Or at least, it is not the final solution to overcoming enemy resistance – and obsolete is perhaps the wrong word for this type of warfare has never been more than an ideal). And in all such cases it is the

⁴⁴ Gerald P. Averill, *Mustang*, 275; Burton F. Anderson, *We Claim the Title*, 329.

heart, *esprit de corps*, training, and will of the rifleman who decides the tactical issue, not the planes of the AF, the guns of the Navy, or the tanks of the Army. It is the infantry of whatever service who both pays and exacts the price of victory. And as long as there is combat, it is doubtful such a constant will ever be overridden.⁴⁵

And the men on the line are most effective when they allow their supporting arms to *supplement* not *replace* their organic weapons. That does not mean, however, that every possible shell or rocket or napalm canister delivered by these arms is not invaluable to the infantry fight. They facilitate the advance and save friendly lives by cracking the morale of the enemy defenders and gouging a not insignificant portion from their numbers. It means that supporting arms alone, air, rockets, and today, missiles, are not the sole or primary instrument for the destruction of enemy forces, when they are in fortifications (or hiding among civilians). In Korea, more artillery rounds were expended than in the whole of World War II. Here the commanders tried to trade steel for lives and succeeded in doing so to the extent their mission had become a defensive rather than an offensive one. Yet the fact remains that on the offense, it is the infantryman, today as then, who finally comes to grips with and defeats an emplaced and determined enemy.

The stalwart dedication to duty and ardent execution of assigned missions displayed by the American infantry around the Punchbowl, both Army and Marine, is all the more remarkable considering the discouraging fact that the “ground-pounder” was fighting for, not the destruction of the enemy armed forces, but just one more hill to add

⁴⁵ Headquarters EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” 108.

to the UN line. The ultimate decision in the war, after the Spring of 1951, would come not from the guns of the fighting forces, but from the pens of negotiators.⁴⁶

However, it is doubtful that the infantryman on the ground had realized the foregoing at this point in the war. Most men knew the Communists had walked out of negotiations. In their minds, that meant the war was back on in the same way as before Kaesong. It was a turning point in morale and the nature of the war in the eyes of the men fighting it.

The men's not knowing they were fighting for a line rather than the more traditional and cultural objective of destroying the enemy's armed forces changed in the fifth phase of the war (this battle was in the fourth phase). Here both sides had resigned themselves to military stalemate in exchange for diplomatic firefights of words and propaganda on the one hand, while casualties continued to mount on the other to hold and adjust the line already in hand. Here, the men realized the talks would drag on indefinitely, and that their lives when lost on the battlefield would be lost for seemingly useless gains or just the status quo. This was a most disheartening prospect, and the state of morale in EUSAK became a real problem for the rest of the war. It became the tendency among more and more troops to fight not for the overall mission in Korea, not for the cause, but simply to survive one's tour or protect ones companions on the line, to avoid dying and simply await rotation home. There was no longer any vision of purpose that commanders could hold up before their men's eyes as a motivation for the combat and to inspire them. The decision to fight and negotiate simultaneously with the emphasis on the latter at the expense of the former, had robbed them of that.

⁴⁶ Burton Kaufman, *The Korean War*, Chapter Five.

It is accepted among most military historians who study the Korean War that the first Communist move for negotiations in the *Spring* of 1951 was for the purpose of gaining respite on the battlefield in order to rebuild its forces, and that the walk-out on these negotiations in August was because they believed themselves ready to return to the battlefield, if not on the offense, then at least on a very strong defense. But in the period of suspended negotiations, their defense proved unsuccessful and any turn to the offense impossible; the UN forces gained ground across the entire front. One key and dear, in Communist eyes, portion of terrain lost was the Punchbowl. Time and again they would argue for its return at the negotiating table.⁴⁷

There is little evidence at present that they did not intend to return to negotiating at any point when they walked out at Kaesong, August 23, 1951, but the losses incurred thereafter probably put impetus to a resumption sooner than the CCF and NKPA may have preferred. The CCF, too, like the Americans in dealing with the South Koreans over the issue of whether to negotiate or not, probably had some doing convincing the NKPA to opt for negotiations rather than an all out campaign to seize the whole of Korea. Possibly, the manifold losses taken by the NKPA in this campaign made them more open to that as the only option. But until North Korea opens its archival records, without censorship, to the world, it is impossible to know for certain whether the losses inflicted on the NKPA in this offensive were for certain instrumental in the decision of the Communists to resume negotiations.⁴⁸

There is the possibility that the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (“after this therefore because of this”) applies to this reasoning – the sun comes up in the

⁴⁷ Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, (London: Frank Cass, 2001, Third Edition): 180; Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War*, 180; Clay Blair, *Forgotten War*, 956.

⁴⁸ Burton Kaufman, *The Korean War*, Chapter Five.

morning after the rooster crows so the rooster must be the cause of the sun coming up. But like there is no direct evidence, per se, that the United states would have lost the Civil War (or at least, not conquered the Confederacy, which is much the same thing) if the British had come in on the side of the Confederacy, it is a reasonable and probable conclusion to make. So, too, is this one.

That the infantry in this offensive showed the Communists determination and tenacious aggression in the face of the most relentless counterattacks they could muster, and that so many Communist soldiers were lost so soon after the rebuilding and regrouping done in the period of the talks at Kaesong -- a period of respite wherein to recover from the most staggering losses of the war, taken in the bitterly failed CCF Spring Offensives -- points to the conclusion that the Communists decided to resume negotiating in October 1951 because of the Fall Offensive. Afterall, one of the “ten principles of war by which the CCF fight,” declared by Mao himself in 1947, stated: “Avoid battles of attrition in which gains are not sufficient to compensate for losses, or in which gains merely balance losses. We (Communists) are numerically inferior, but we must secure local superiority in every section and every campaign.”⁴⁹

The American infantry showed the Communists resolve, improved the UN terrain for the UN defensive line, and gained ground for South Korea, even in the offense taking fewer casualties than an enemy on the defense (defense, noted Clausewitz, is the stronger form of war) at a time when Washington and its allies like Britain and France were showing weakness and wringing their hands in fear of Soviet intervention. The infantry put the steel in what otherwise would be limp words at the negotiating table, providing further evidence, if the Communists thought the truce talks signaled

⁴⁹ Headquarter EUSAK, “Enemy Tactics,” viii; Burton Kaufman, *The Korean War*, Chapter Five.

military weakness in the UNC, that this was *not* the case and that further combat would result in the UNC *gaining* ground, not losing it. The period between Communist indefinite suspension of the peace talks and the resumption of these talks had resulted only in more lives lost and less Korean soil behind Communist lines. (The Fall Offensive had gained had gained approximately fifteen more miles of ground in the X Corps zone.) One tenet of Sun Tzu is to attack one's enemy's weakness, and the Communists probably saw the weakness of the Americans (the chief belligerent on the UN side) to be in negotiating.⁵⁰

Furthermore, one point Americans had stressed was that the demarcation line, when reached, should be the actual line of contact, not the 38th Parallel, which would have resulted only in the *status quo antebellum*. Resuming the talks would make the Americans back off their offensive movement (they probably hoped – it had the first time the talks had been held) before more ground was lost, showed the prolongation of active warfare to be to the American's advantage, and that negotiating was the instrument whereby the most advantage could be had against the Americans in propaganda victories, technique, and will. The Communists had great faith that their negotiators were far better than any the UN could send. Furthermore, dealing more directly with Washington and its State Department (even though it was still indirect via negotiators who were military officers) would produce more gains for the Communist cause than bullets would in facing the Department of Defense's fighting forces.⁵¹

One conclusion is inescapable. At least from the Marine perspective, the application of its forces in the Inchon/Seoul operation on the one hand, and the advance

⁵⁰ Burton Kaufman, *The Korean War*, Chapter Five.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

north of the Punchbowl on the other, showed the far greater effectiveness (if the traditional goal of war, to force the enemy to submit to one's will, was maintained) of the amphibious turning movement and assault inland from the sea over the rigorous frontal assault through the mountains far away from the sea.⁵²

The Marines had had to fight like an Army Division and had done so very well. They were out of range of NGF until September 23 when the lines had extended far enough east in the division sector that it could be brought to bear. Nevertheless, the sea was still 20 miles off.⁵³

While Marines did foresee the fact that their forces might very well be used in land campaigns in their thinking before the war, the view after the campaigns of 1951 regarded this as a very serious possibility, even a *probability*. To that end, the U. S. Pacific Fleet and the Marine Corps examined the organization and performance of the 1st Mar Div in Korea. Several shortcomings were observed in the division for operations in extended land campaigns, but these were mostly in the area of too little organic motor transport and too little material and supply in communications sections.

Nevertheless, the Marines still preferred amphibious operations as its best potential contribution to a war whether it be a limited or "all-out" war. The campaigns of 1951 and the manner in which the Marines were utilized in them, led to further emphasis by the Navy and Marine Corps on how Marines should be employed in war:

⁵² It might be said by some here that the Marines and Navy were against MacArthur's Inchon plan. This is *not the case at all*. The Marines and Navy were all for an amphibious hook as MacArthur envisioned it, they did, however, disagree with the *location* being Inchon, arguing on very sound doctrinal principles for a location just south of the city, which presented a better amphibious landing location. And always after Inchon, the Marines and Navy pushed for another such amphibious hook. It should also be remembered that at Okinawa, the Marines and Navy were for an amphibious end-run around the Japanese main line of resistance, when it was encountered, to take them in the rear, but this decision was overruled by the Army who preferred to slug it out in frontal assaults along the land mass.

⁵³ 1st Mar Div, "Historical Diary," September 1951, 4.

[Concluded:] That whenever possible, a Marine force, operating in an extended land campaign as part of a field army, capitalize on its special skills in employing naval gunfire support, the Navy-Marine system of close air support, and the amphibious maneuver, by being assigned a zone of action near the sea. . . . That the Marines' value as an amphibious force of the mobile fleet or as a mobile theater reserve force, be compared to their value as an ordinary component of a ground army.⁵⁴

In other words, the Navy and Marine Corps saw in the use of Marines as troops in an extended land campaign what economists call an "opportunity cost." Though the Marines made a very efficient and effective element within a land army as another infantry division on the line, this cost the opportunity to use the Marines to greater effect on the overall course of the war. Operation Wrangler was a perfect example (see chapter summarizing the Marine's operations of 1951 prior to the Fall Offensive). So, too, was the "Kojo Operation" mentioned by Thomas (see page thirty-five) in which the 1st Mar Div and the 8th ROK Div would make an amphibious hook around the east end of the NKPA defensive line and destroy it from the rear and flanks.

The comparatively narrow geographical zone of action later presented by Vietnam caused proximity to the sea to be much less of a problem. Marine experience in Korea doubtless had an influence on Marine Corps preferences and policies in Vietnam. For example, important Marine generals in Vietnam, such as Lt Gen Lewis Walt and Lt Gen Victor H. Krulak, had served with the 1st Mar Div in Korea. Walt specifically had commanded a Marine regiment during the stalemate phase on the Jamestown Line in west Korea, and Krulak had been General Thomas's chief of staff throughout 1951. Marines in Vietnam also had the kind of air support they wanted and depended upon.

And even though the Marine preferences for the way it was employed in September 1951 were not followed and the division had inadequate CAS and little NGF,

⁵⁴ U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report," 15-6.

the Marines who fought there and the way they fought still bore the indelible mark of the Marine Corps and its culture and values in their performance, conduct, attitude, and accomplishments. And while the standards Marines hold for themselves are sometimes exaggerated, the 1st Mar Div in Korea, 1951, added many laurels to the name of Marine, and bore its “proud burden” well.⁵⁵

Until North Korea opens up its archives, and if its documents are authentic and not merely propaganda, a more complete picture of this battle cannot be had. This is one of the biggest weaknesses of Korean War historiography: relatively few documents can be had from the Communist side, and the question is important whether any that do see light are not edited as to their content by the Communist governments.

And one thing is certain, no matter how forgotten Korea is and this battle in particular, the men who were there can never forget.

Oscar Franco has never been the same:

Even today, I am not completely over being “shell shocked.” Any sudden noise will make me jump. I landed in the hospital two to three times after I got back in 1952. One time the rodeo parade was going through downtown when they shot their .45s. I hit the deck in front of the Woolworth’s store! People gathered around me and a policeman wanted to know if I was drunk. . . .

When I worked for the City of Tucson, the guys at work had a steel plate that they would drop on the floor near me to see me jump. It was a big joke to them. . . .⁵⁶

William T. Dunn recalled:

I brought with me the names of five Marines that I was with when they died, as I thought perhaps it might ease their parent’s pain, if they talked to someone who was with them when they died. The first visit was to the parents of Dave Munson from Richmond. This was about a week after I returned home that I drove to Richmond, went to the newspaper office for his address and located his house. He was an only child and his parents were two of the finest people

⁵⁵ “Indelible” is certainly the best word to use; it means, “incapable of being erased or removed.”

⁵⁶ Oral memoir of Oscar “Challo” Franco.

that I had ever met, but there were so many questions, and so many tears, that when I left their house, I threw the remaining list away. It was just too emotional.

Started the making use of the GI Bill, got married, raised a family and got on with my life. I have been so fortunate, and life has been so good to me, that I would never want to change anything. However, not a day has gone by in the last 50 years that I have not thought about my time in Korea.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Account of William T. Dunn, "My Year in Korea, 1950-1951." Found at: www.1-7marineskorea.com/weremember/my_year_in_korea.htm. Website last consulted April 2007.



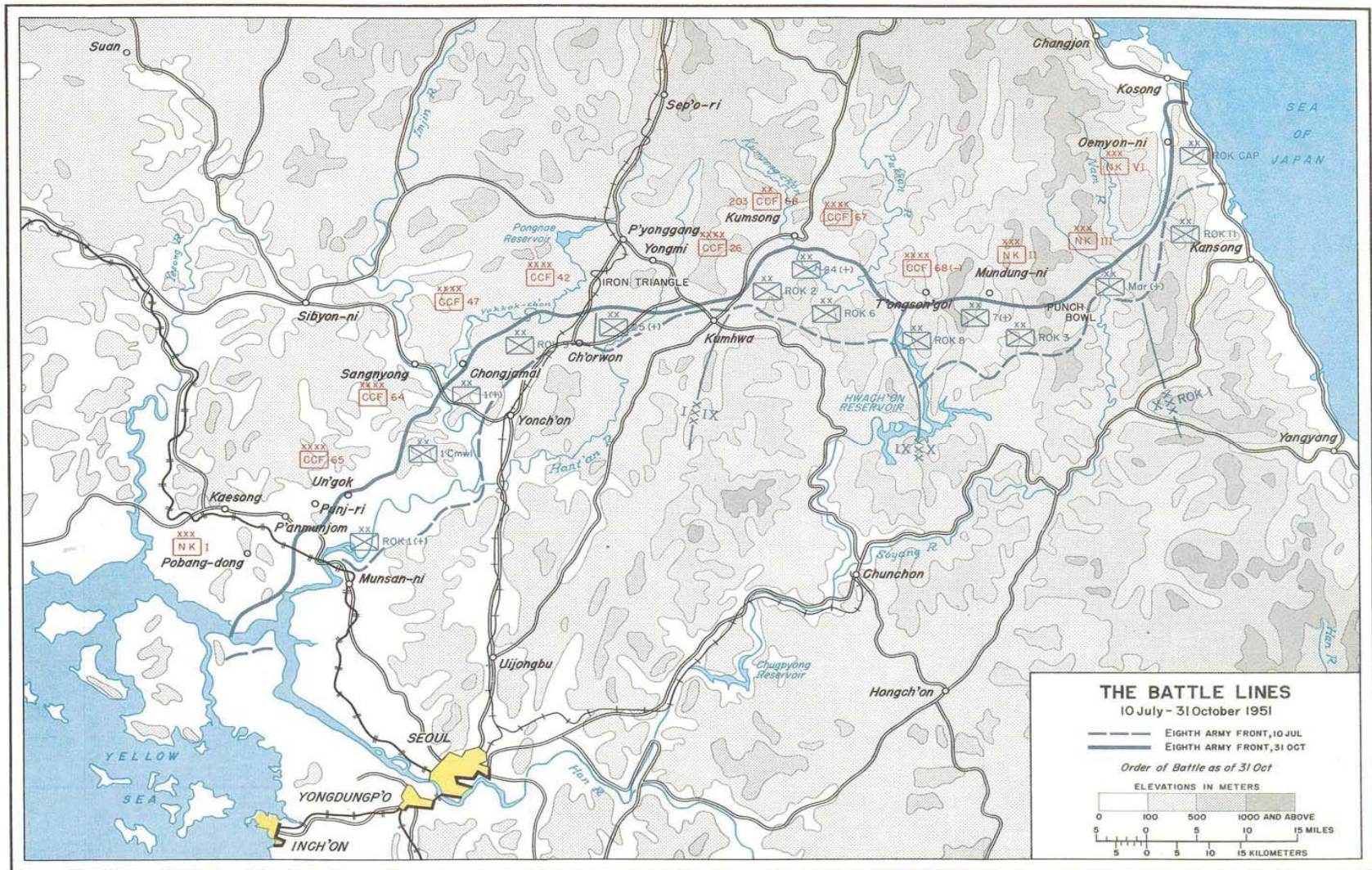
Map 1

Source: Hermes, Truce Tent and Fighting Front



Map 2

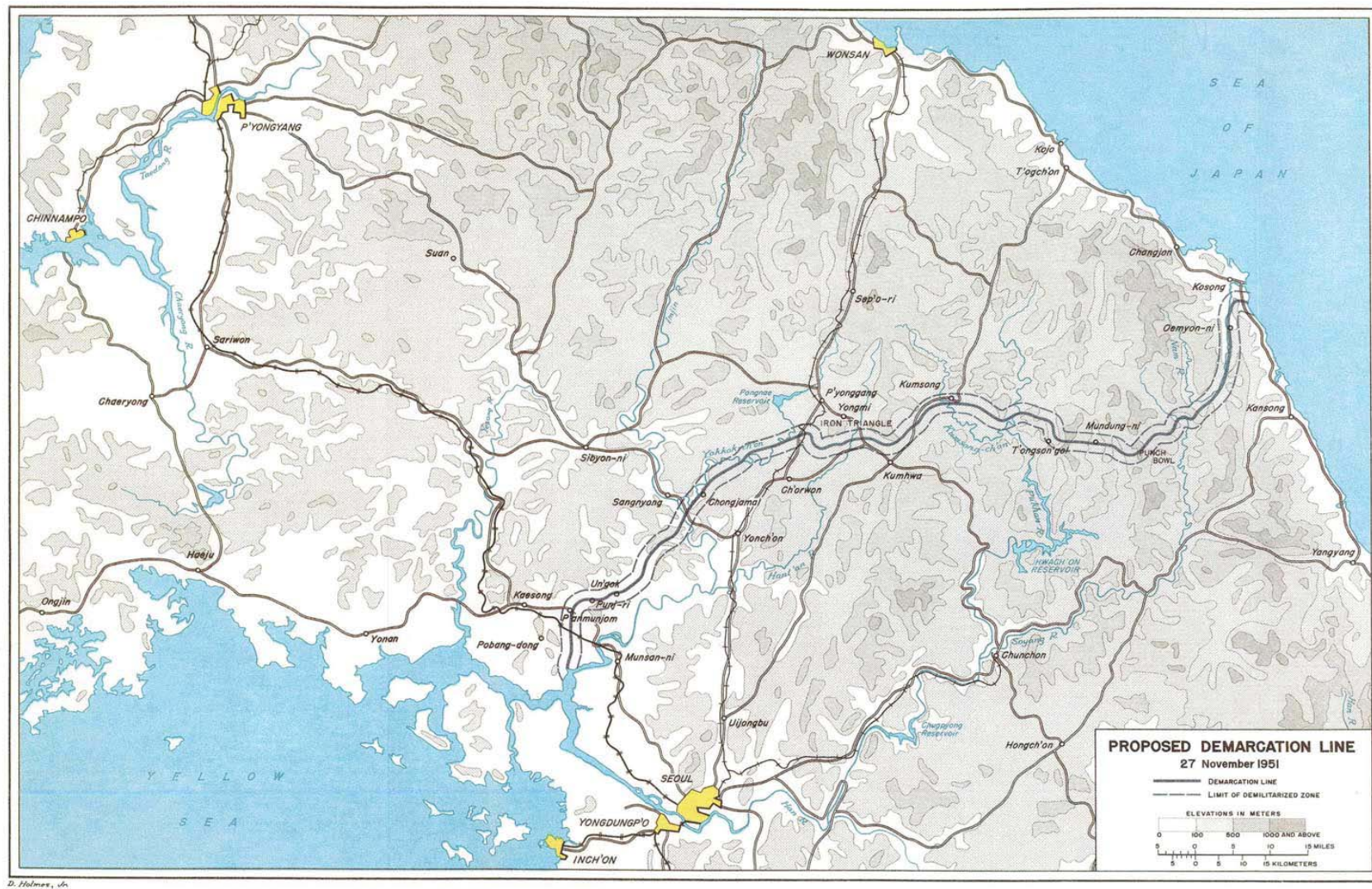
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M. C. Brewer, Jr.

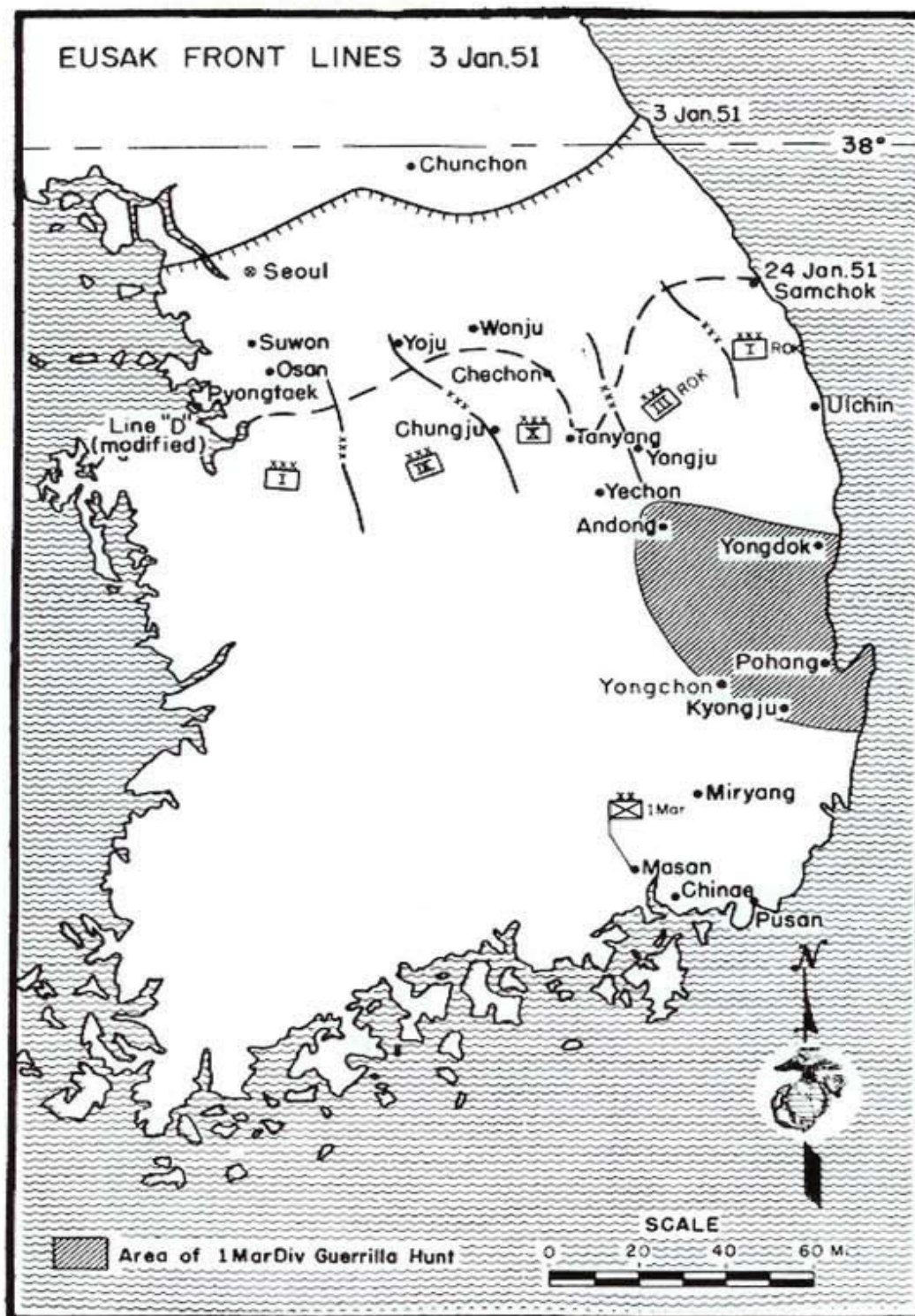
Map 3

Source: Hermes, Truce Tent and Fighting Front.



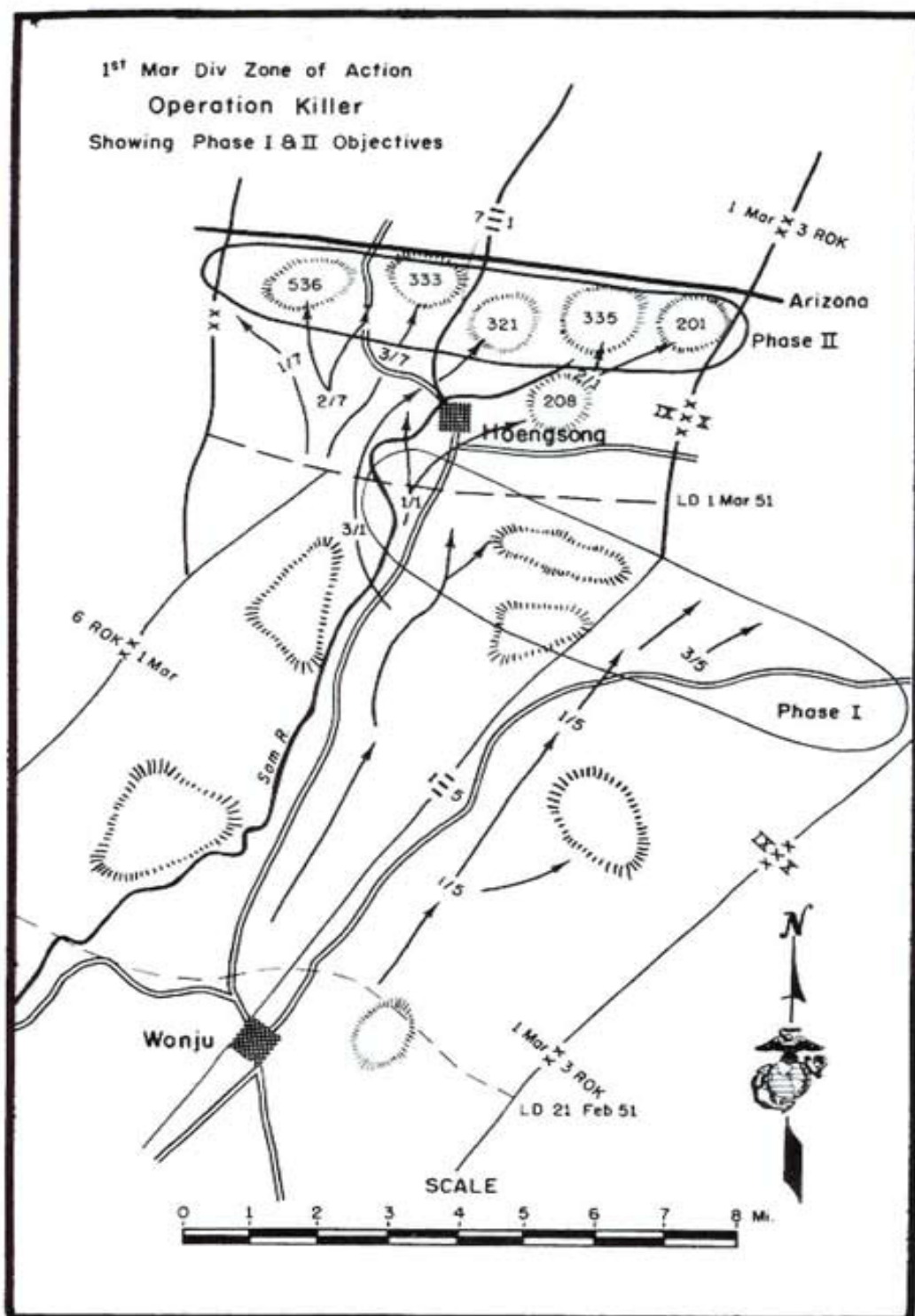
Map 4

Source: Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*.



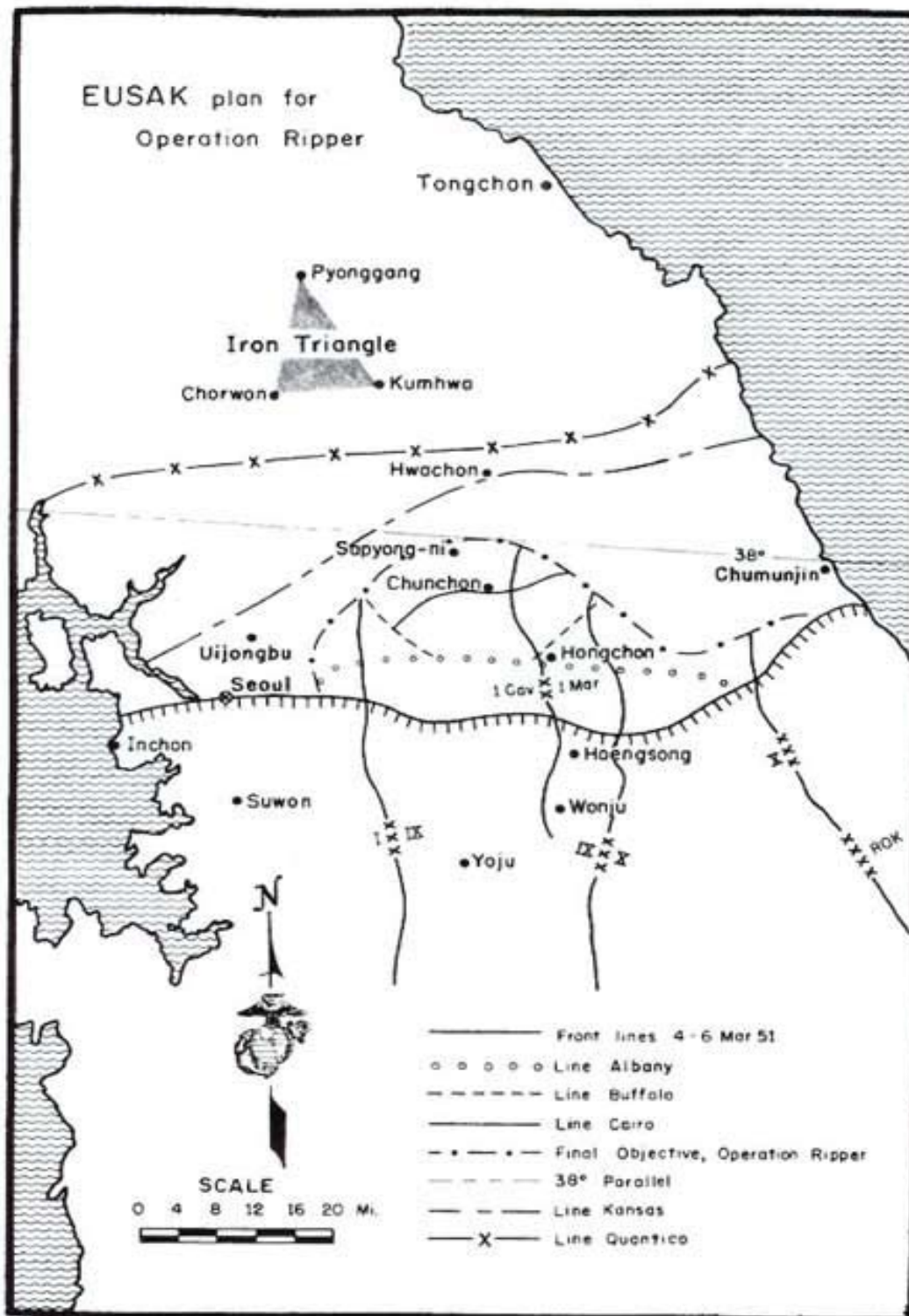
Map 5

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



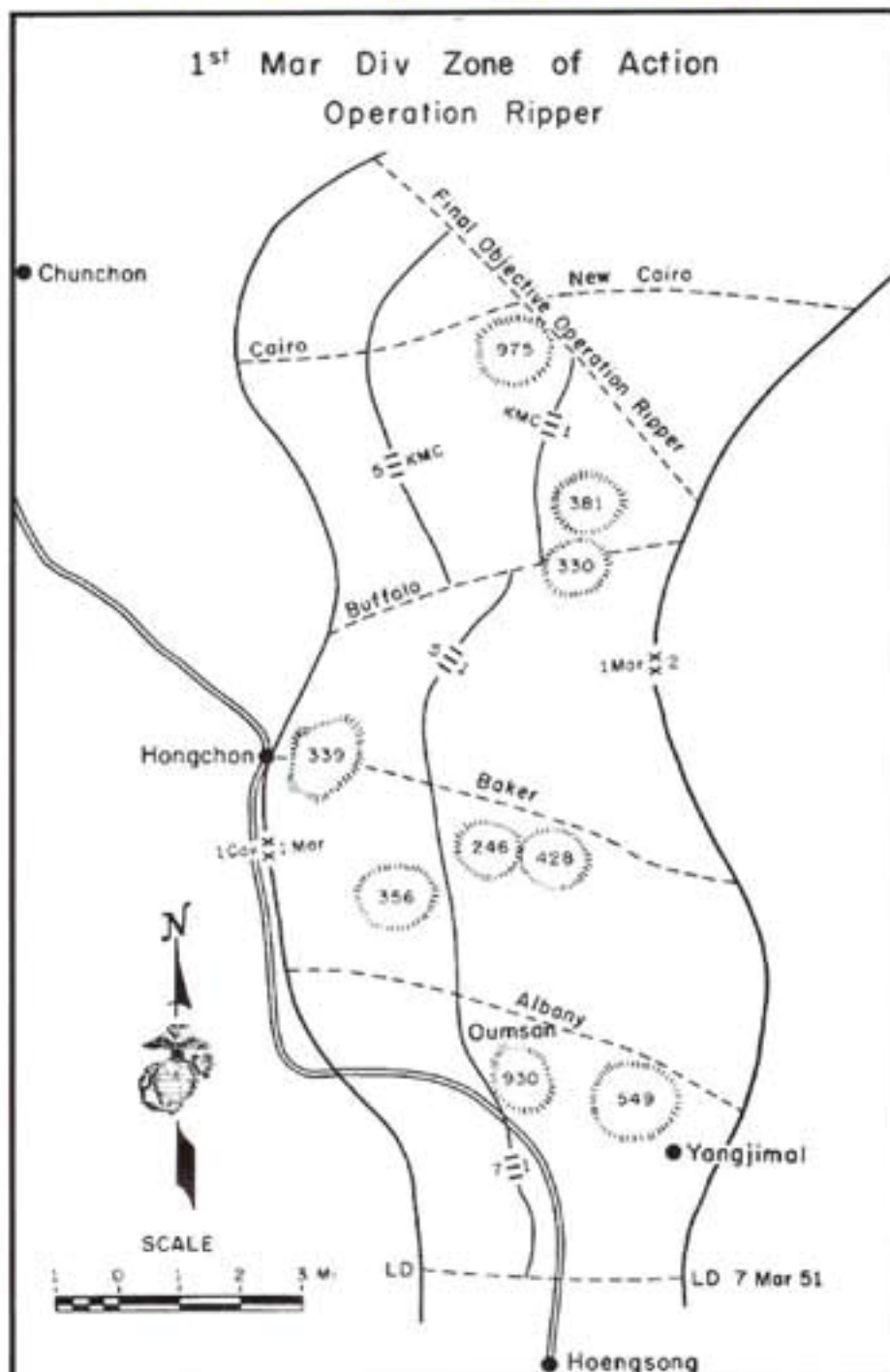
Map 6

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*

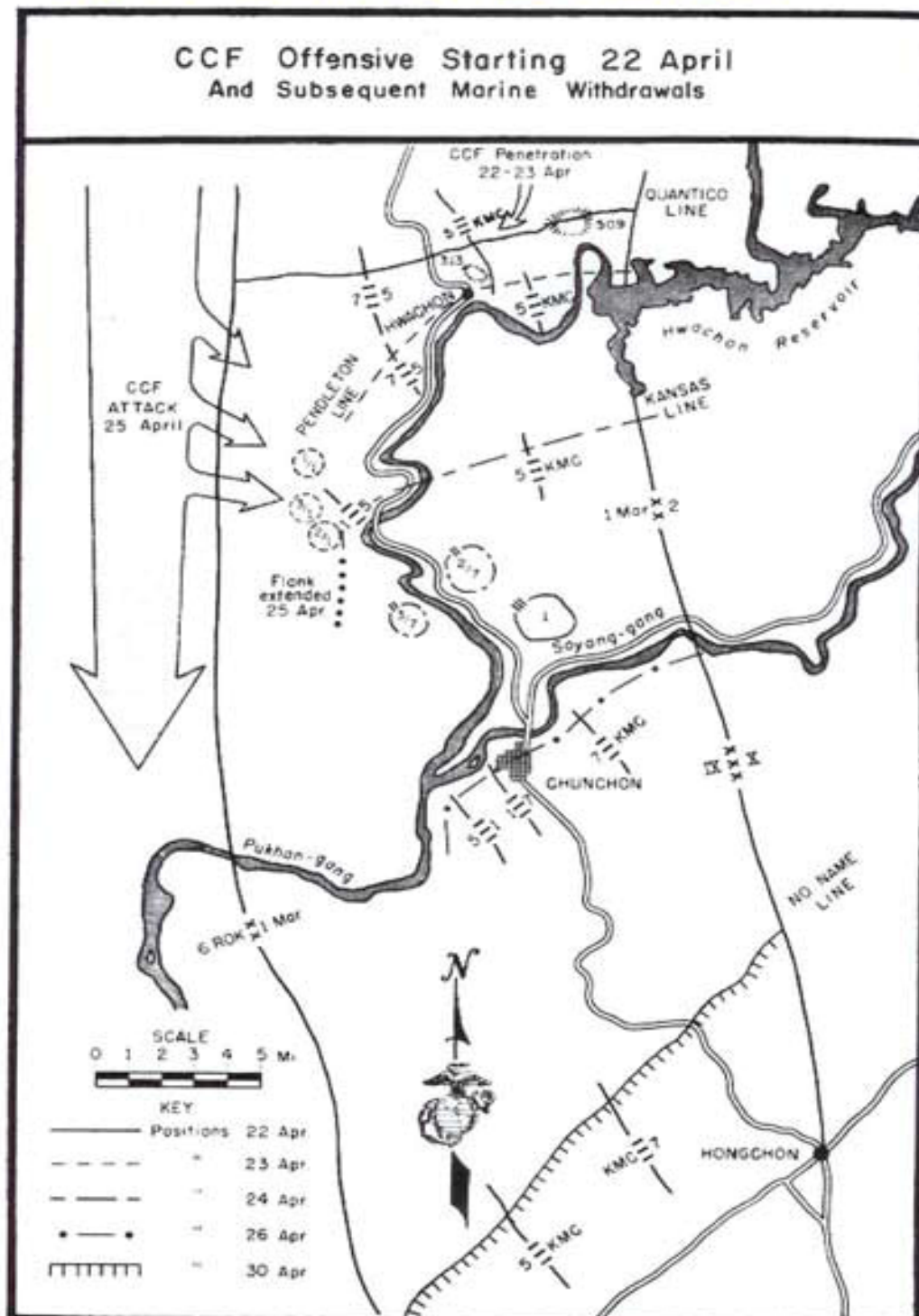


Map 7

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*

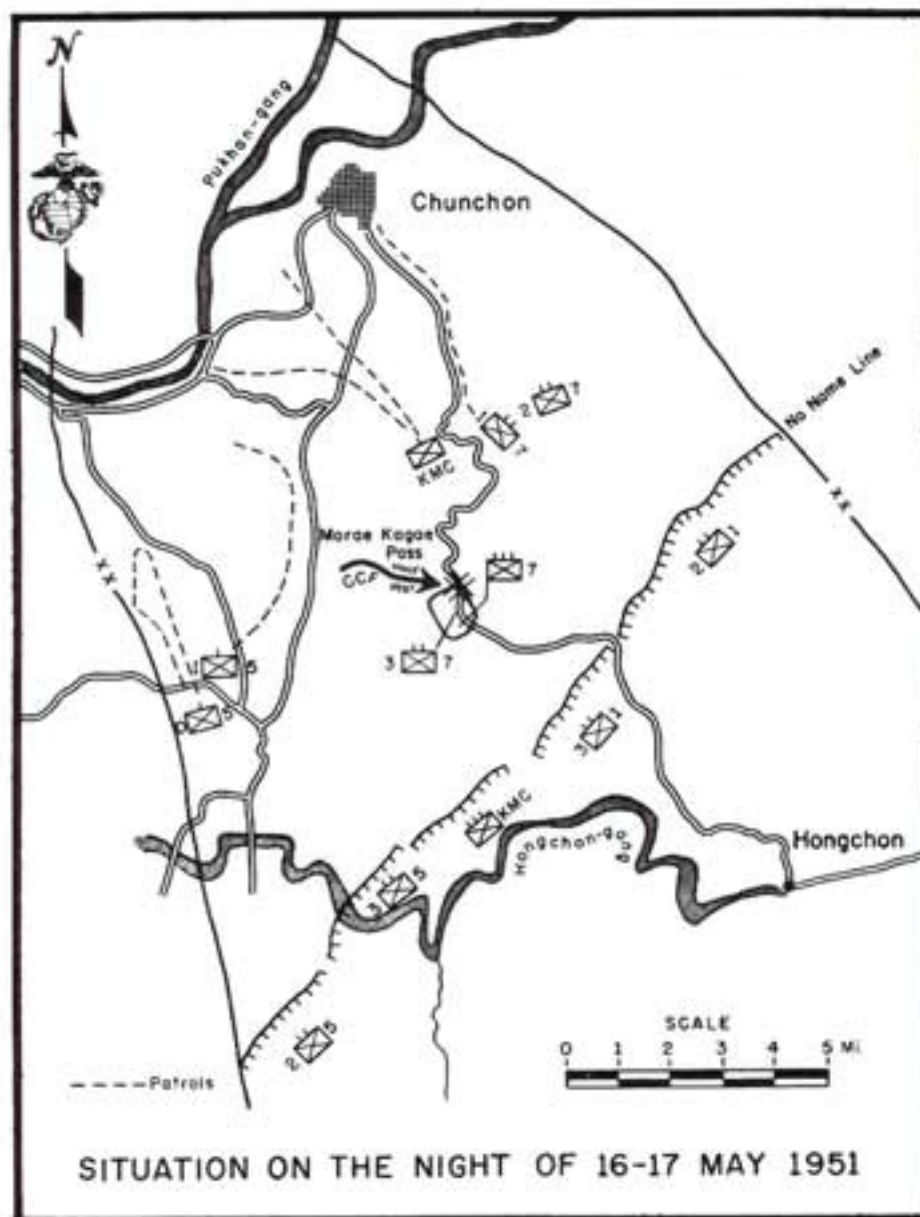


Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



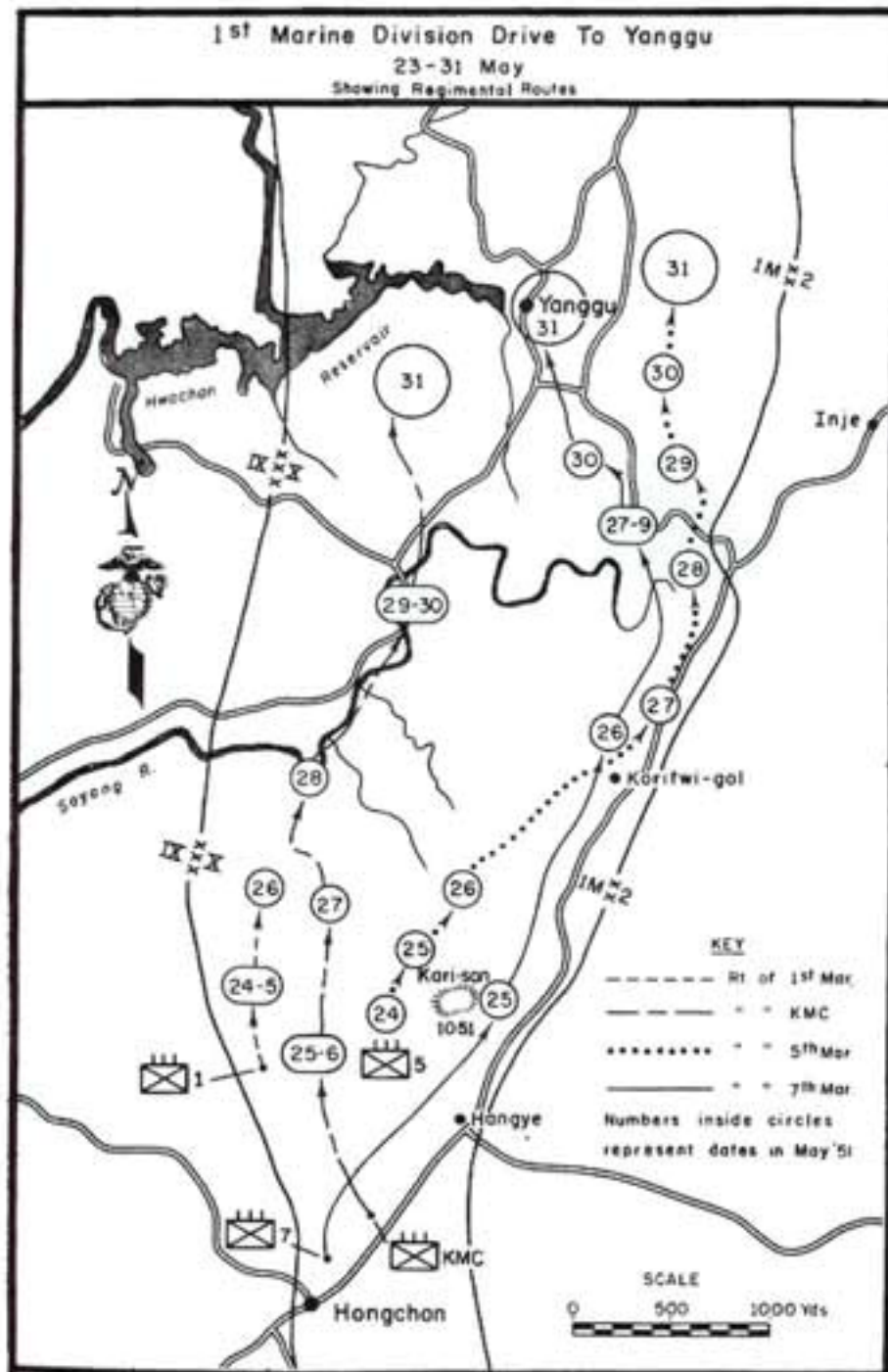
Map 9

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



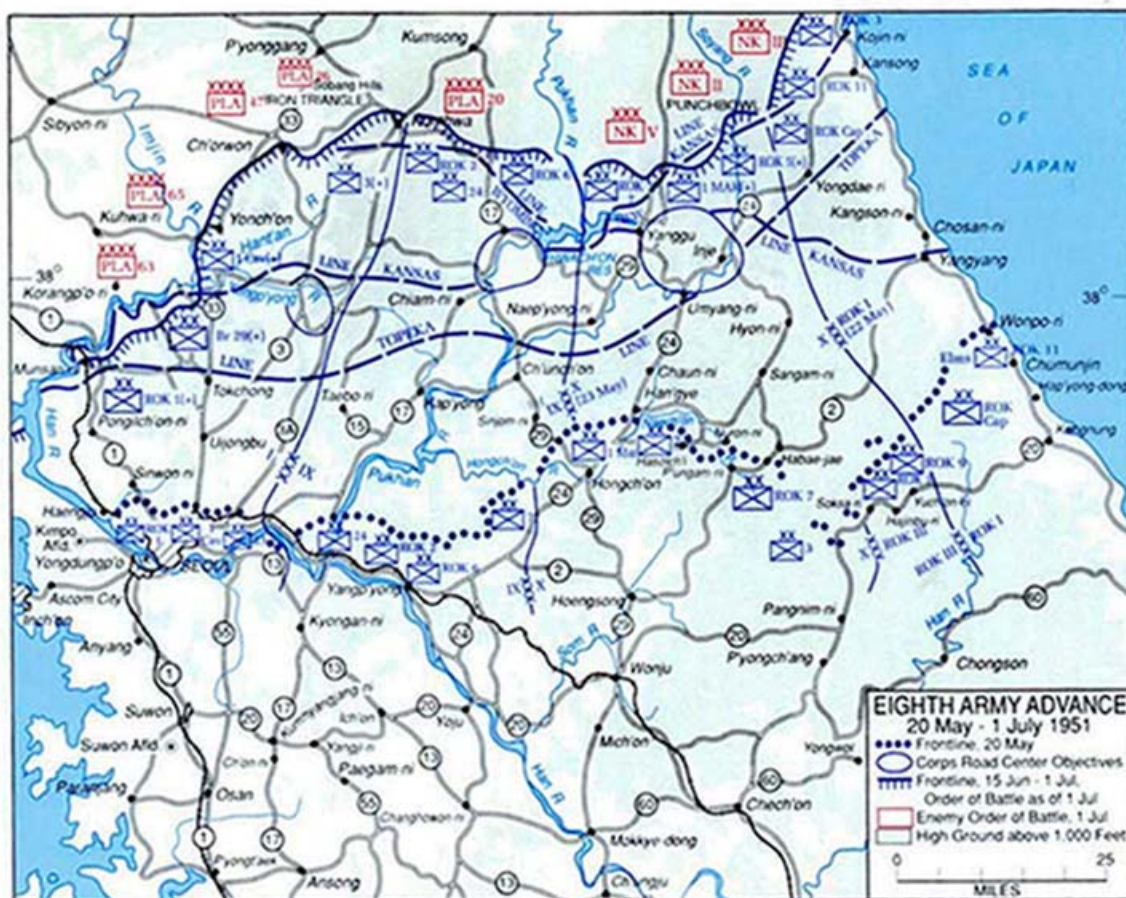
Map 10

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



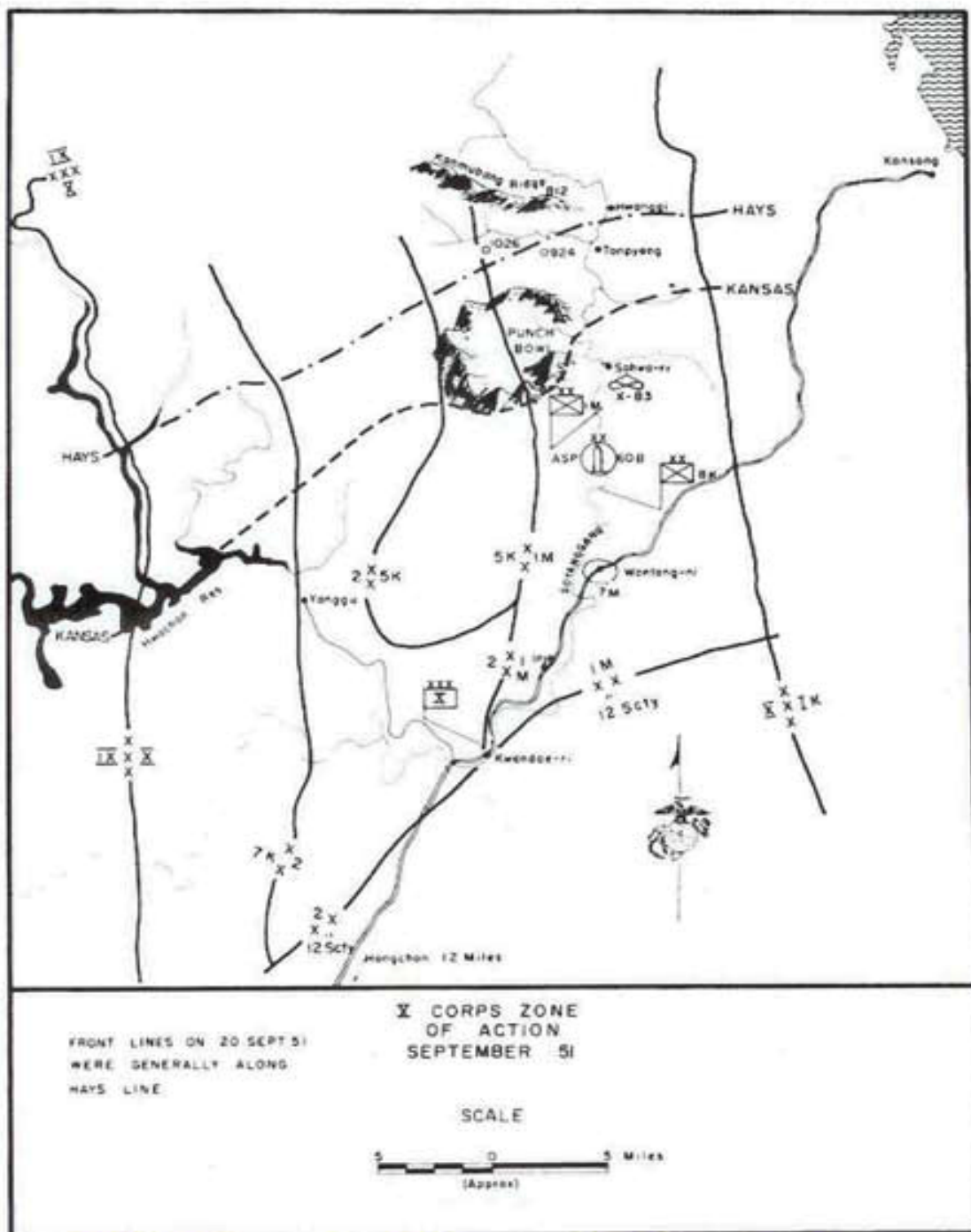
Map 11

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



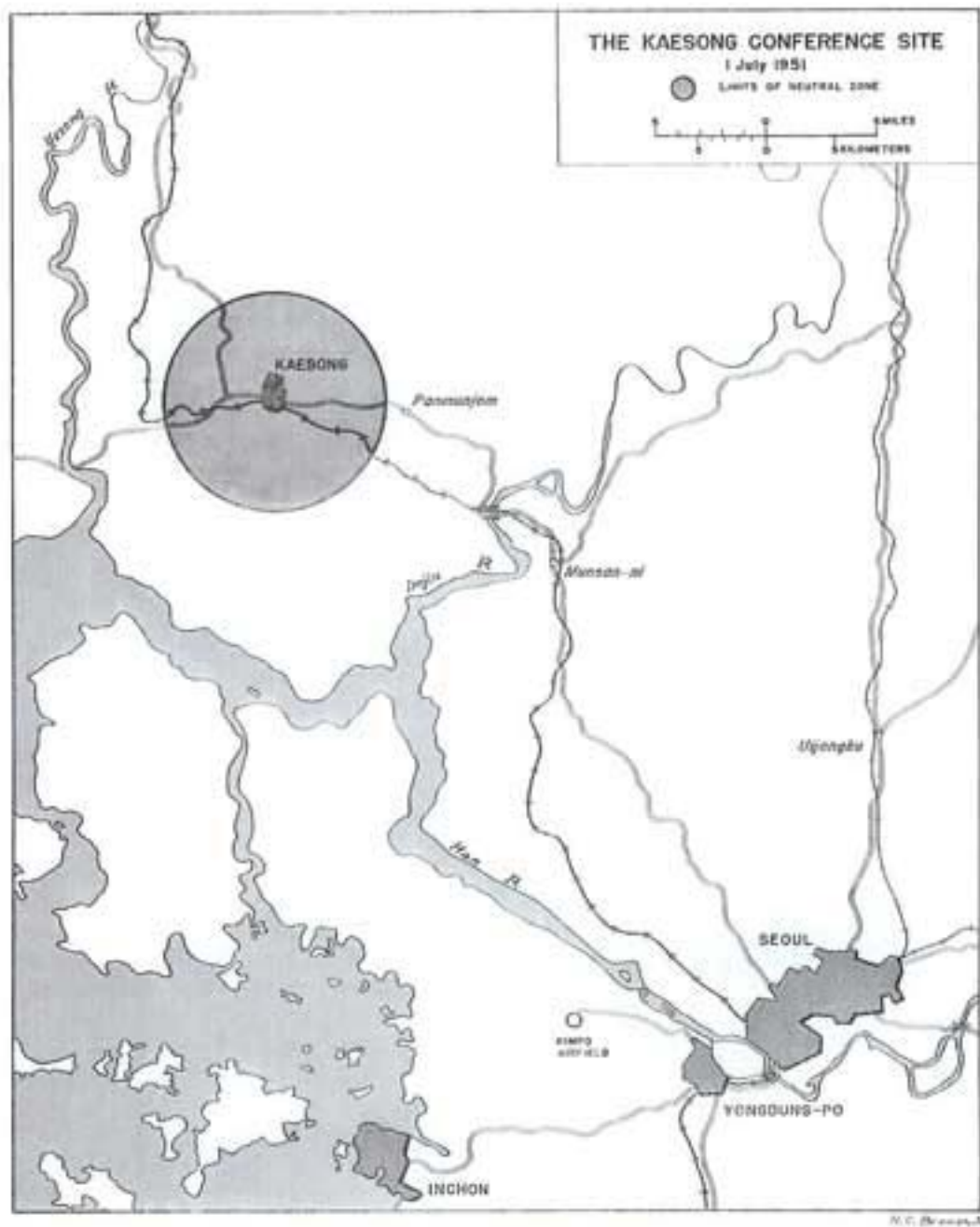
Map 12

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



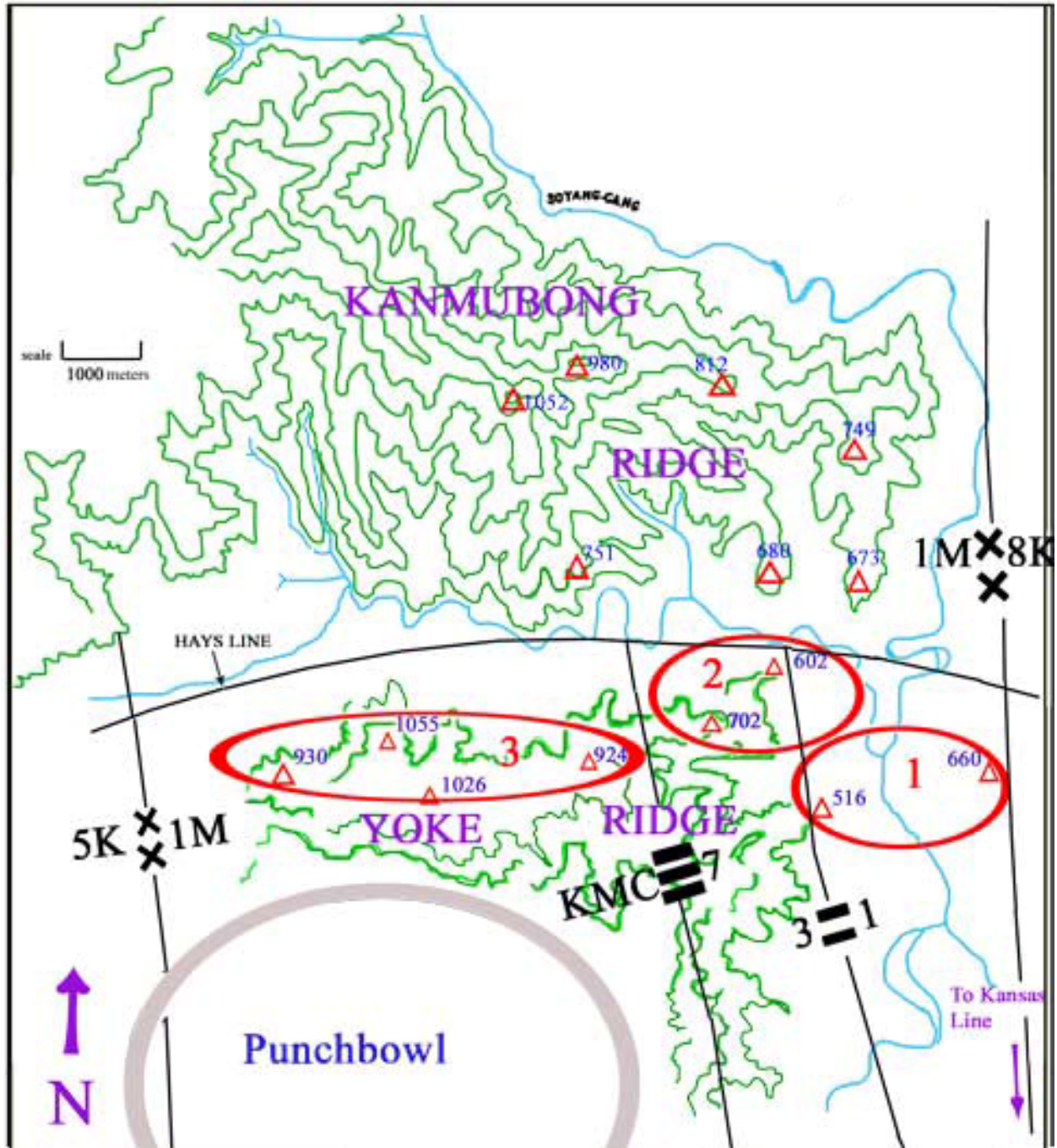
Map 13

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



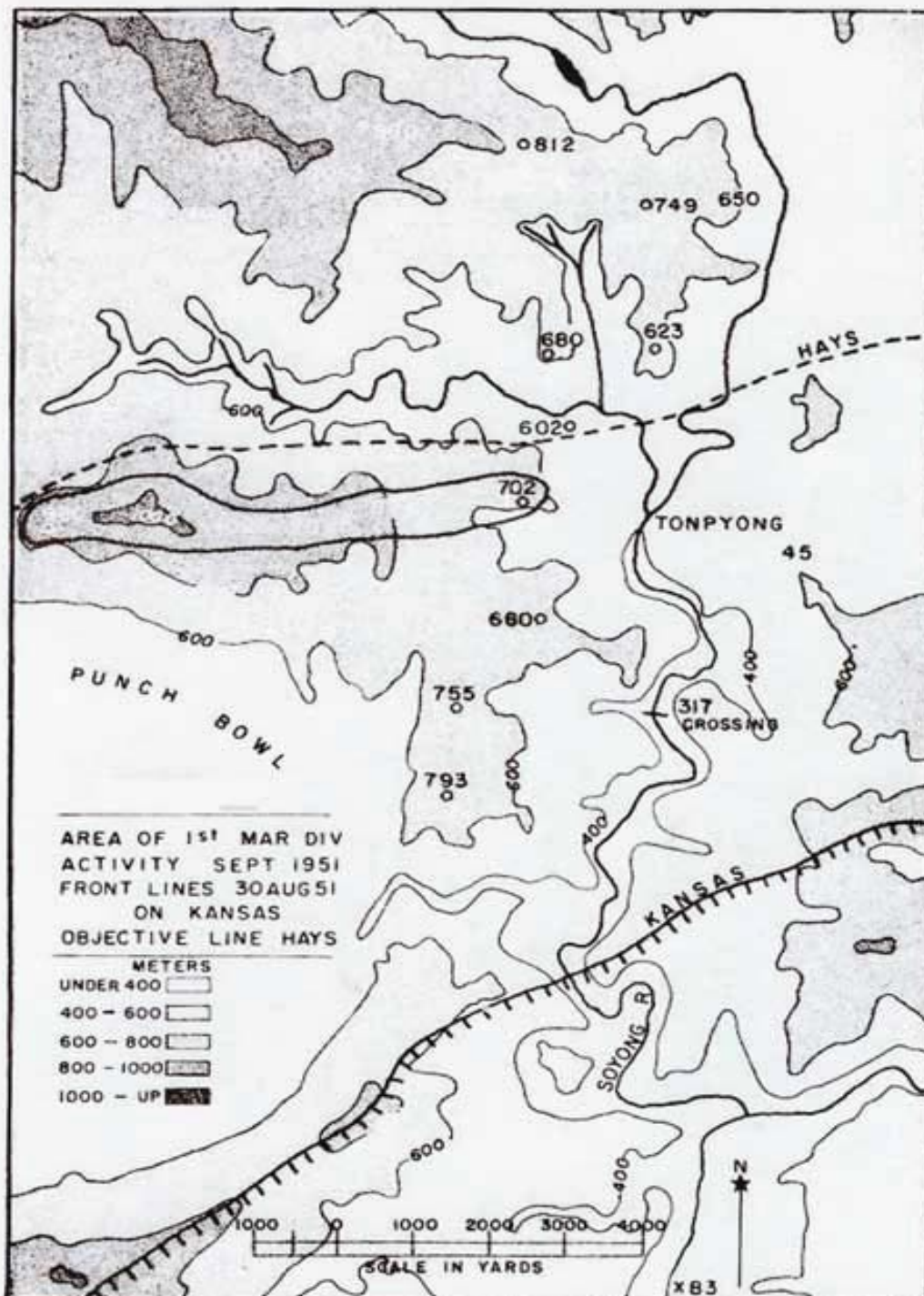
Map 14

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*



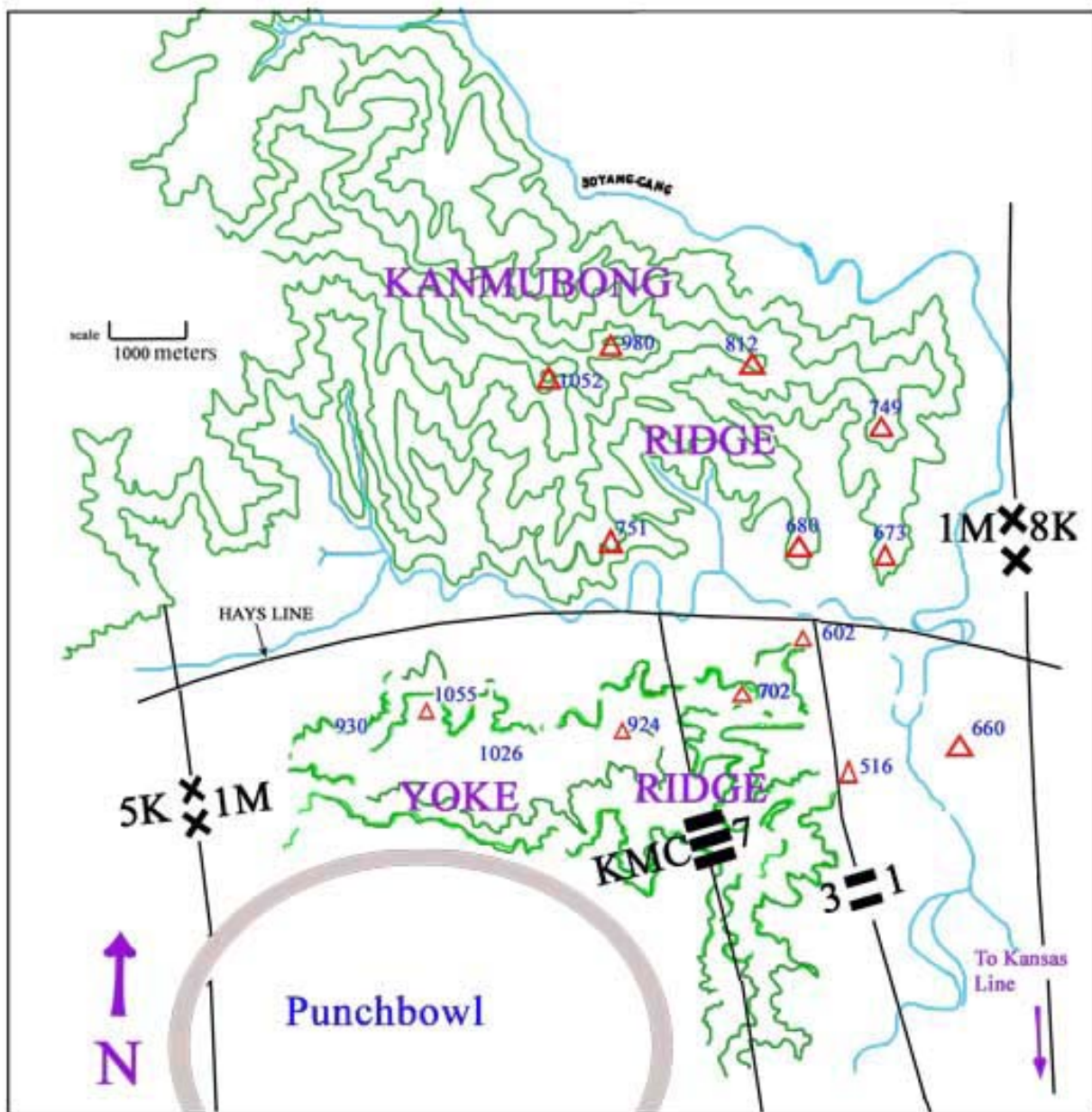
Map 15

Yoke Ridge With Boundaries and Division Objectives

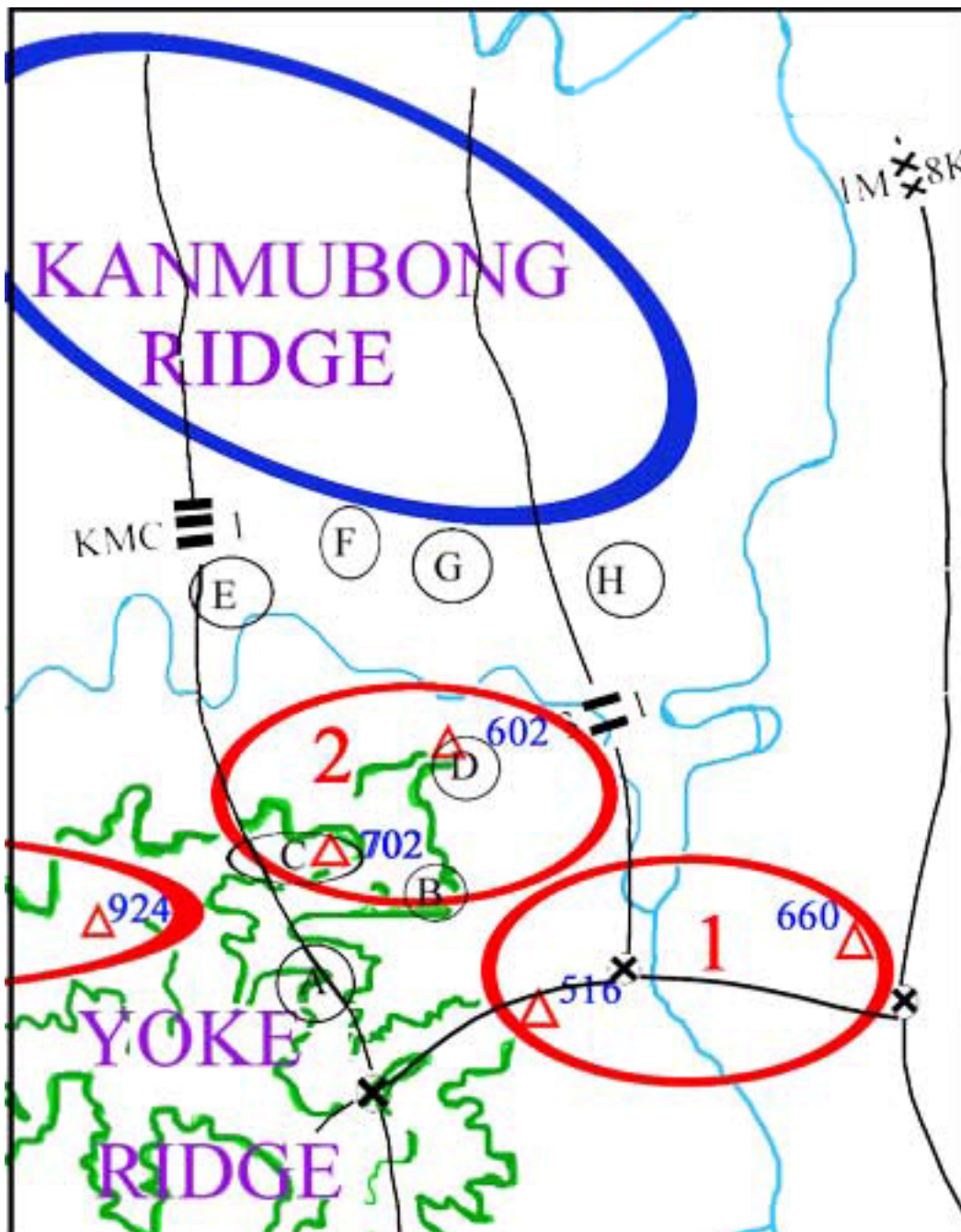


Map 16

Source: Lynn Montross, et al., *The East Central Front*

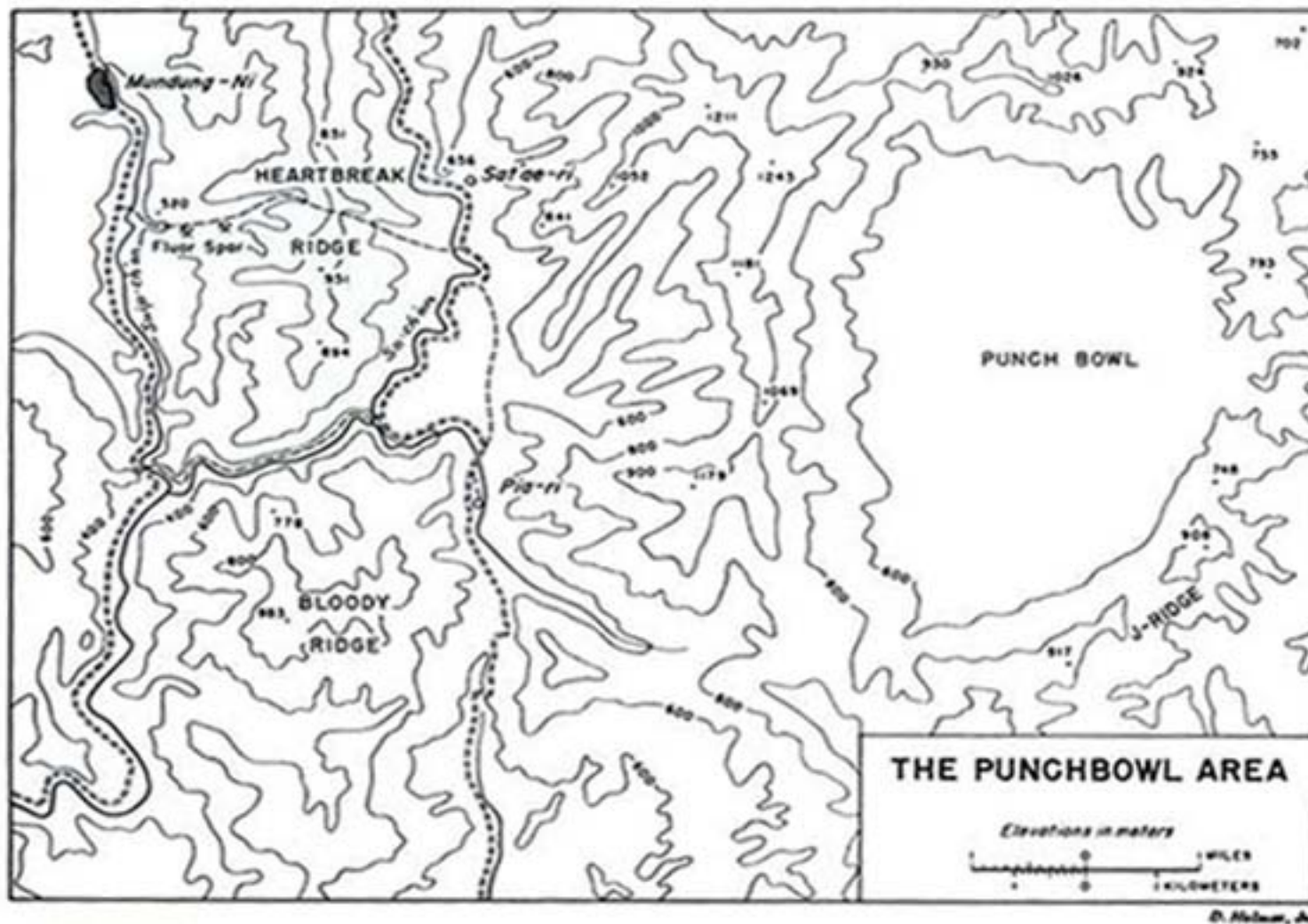


Map 17
Yoke and Kanmubong Ridges and Prominent Terrain



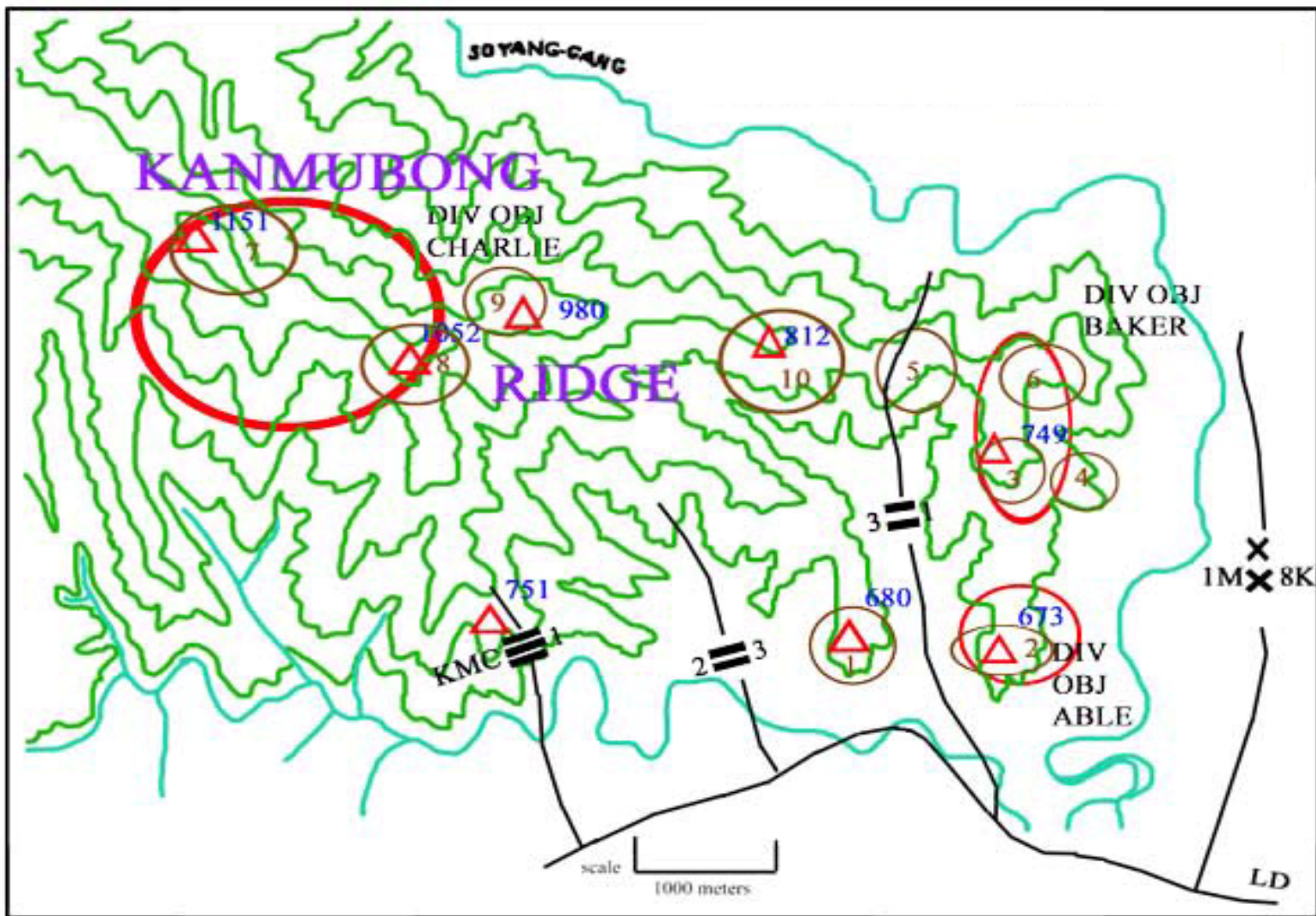
Map 18

3/7's Objectives in the Sector of Yoke Ridge



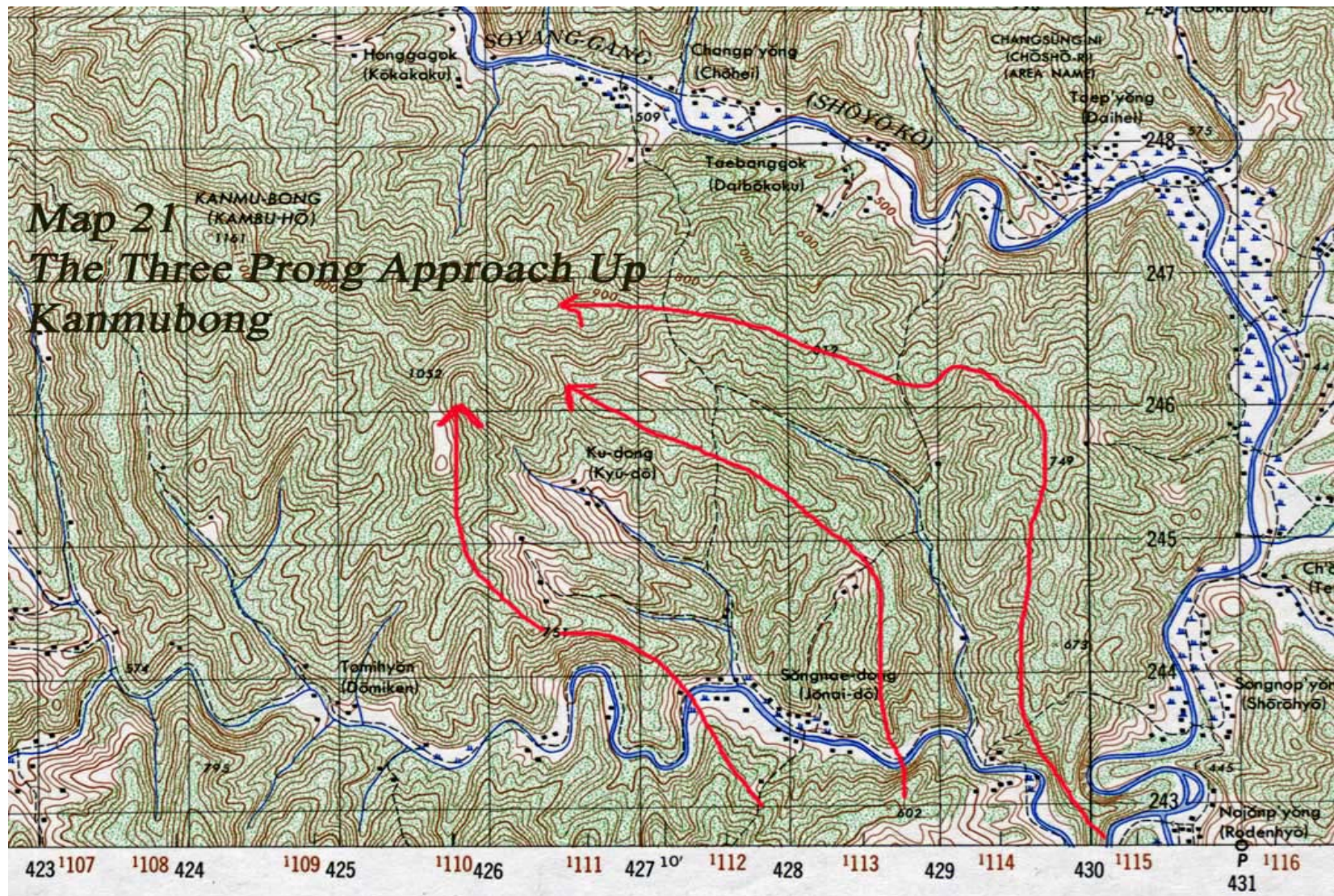
Map 19

Source: Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*



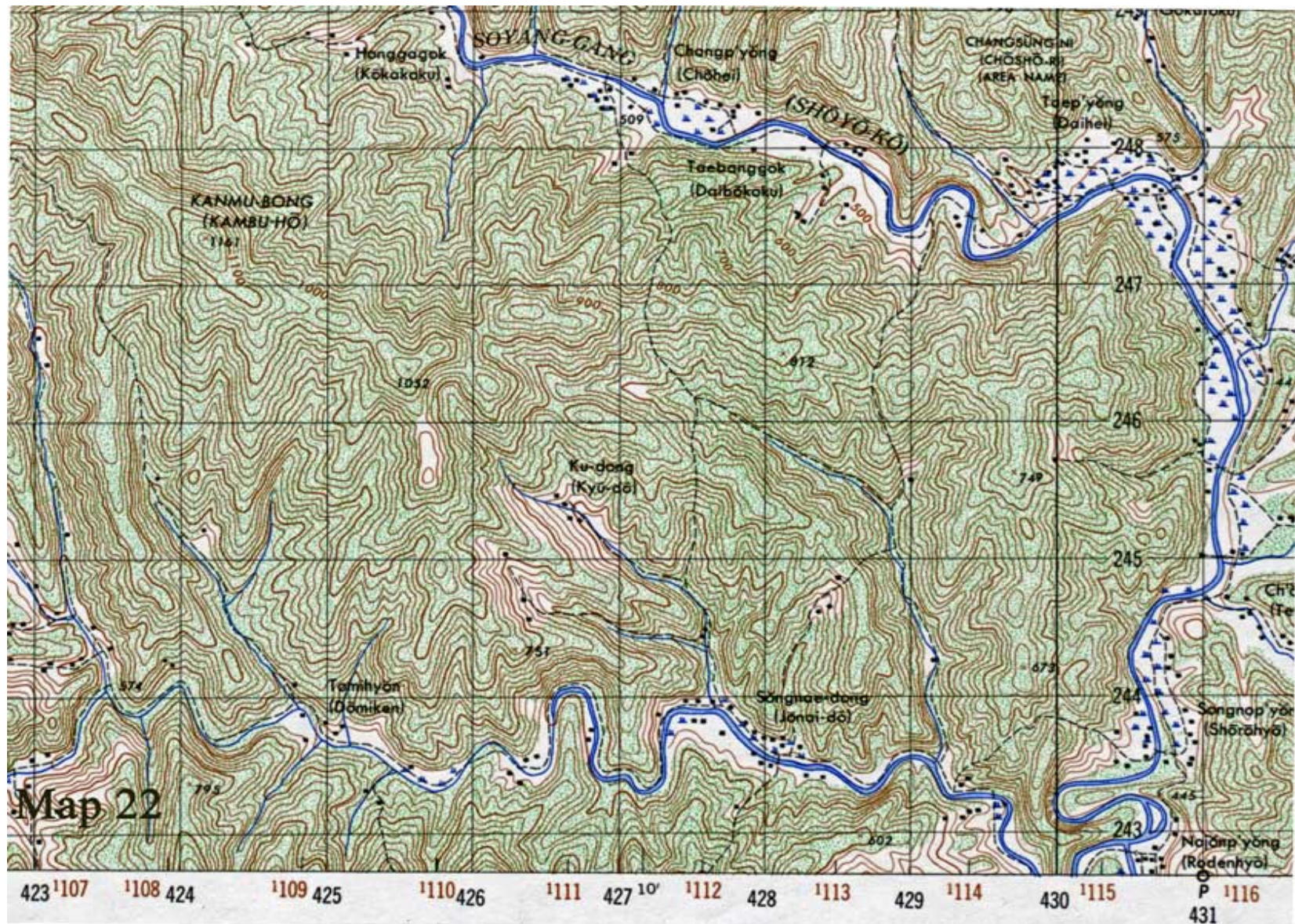
Map 20

Objectives of Division and 7th Marines for Kanmubong Ridge

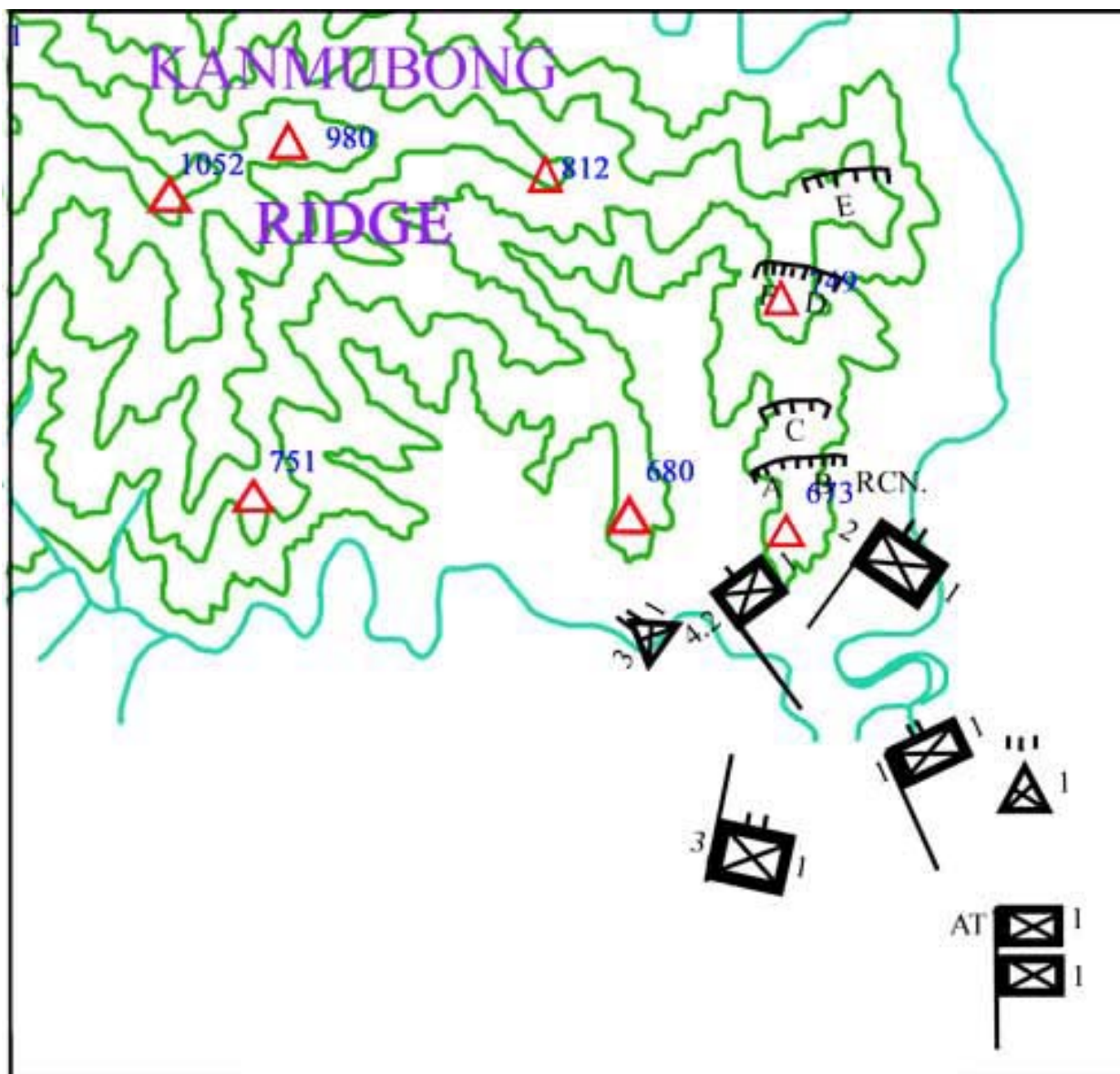


Map 21

The Three Prong Approach up Kanmubong

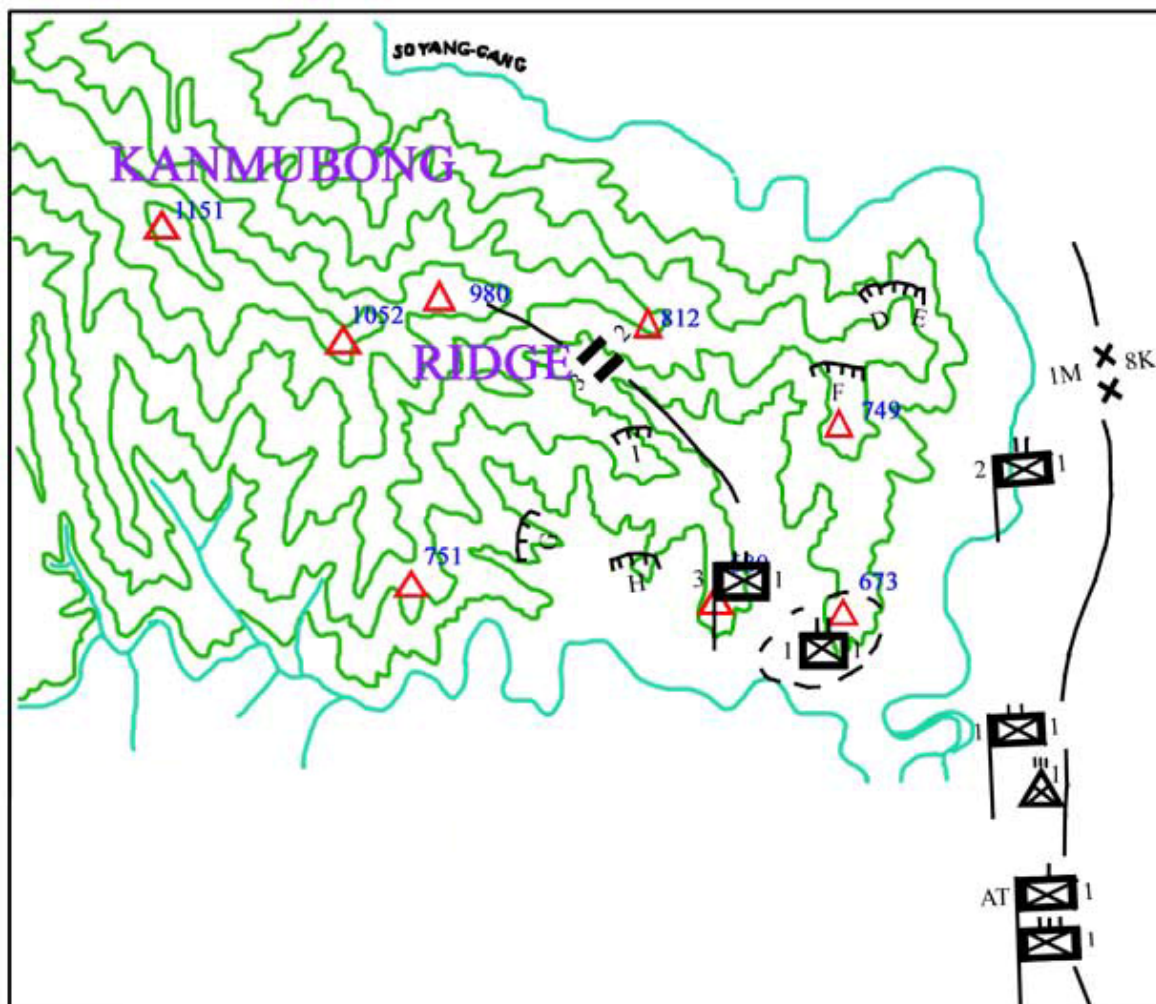


Map 22



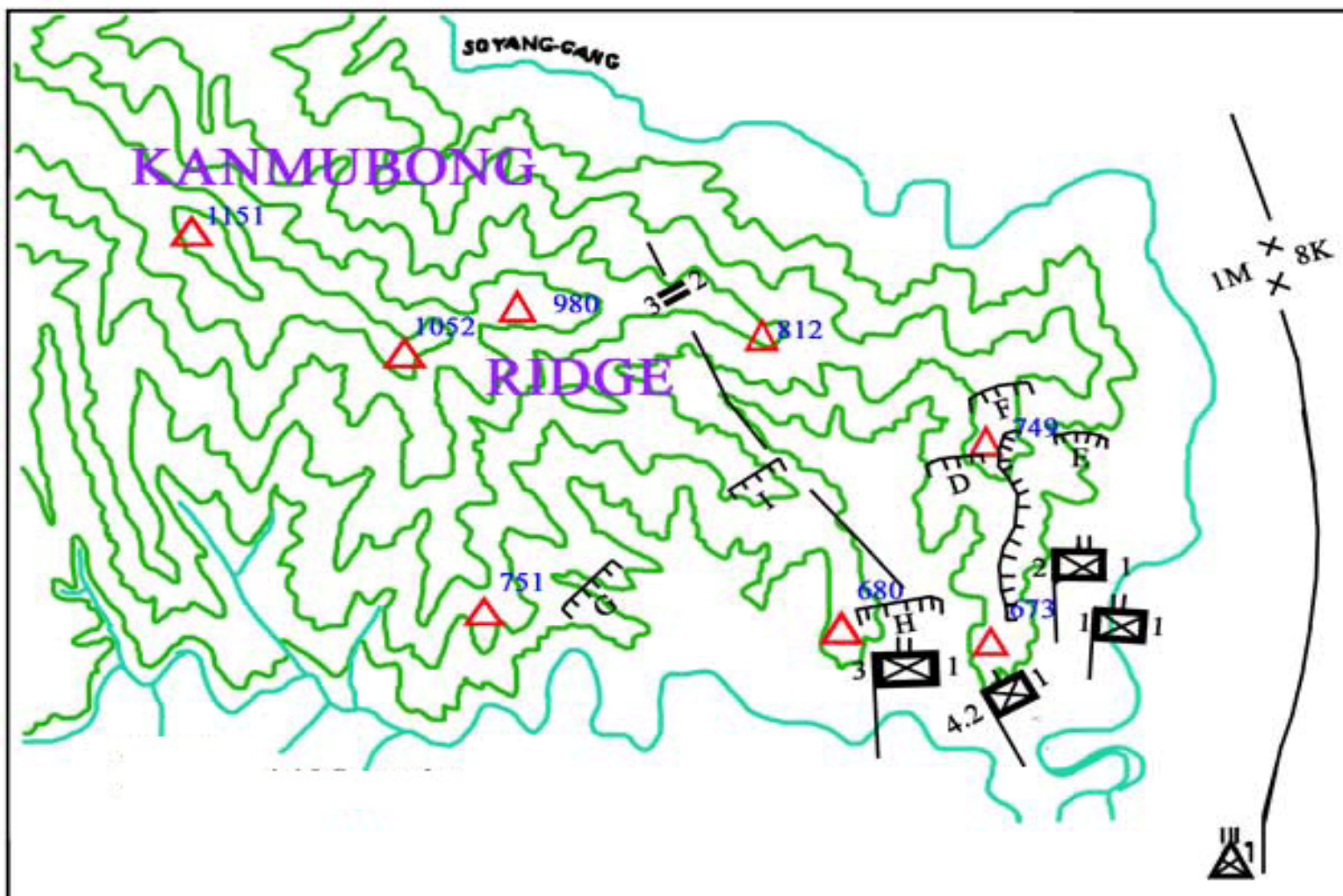
Map 23

Situation as of 2200, September 12, 1951



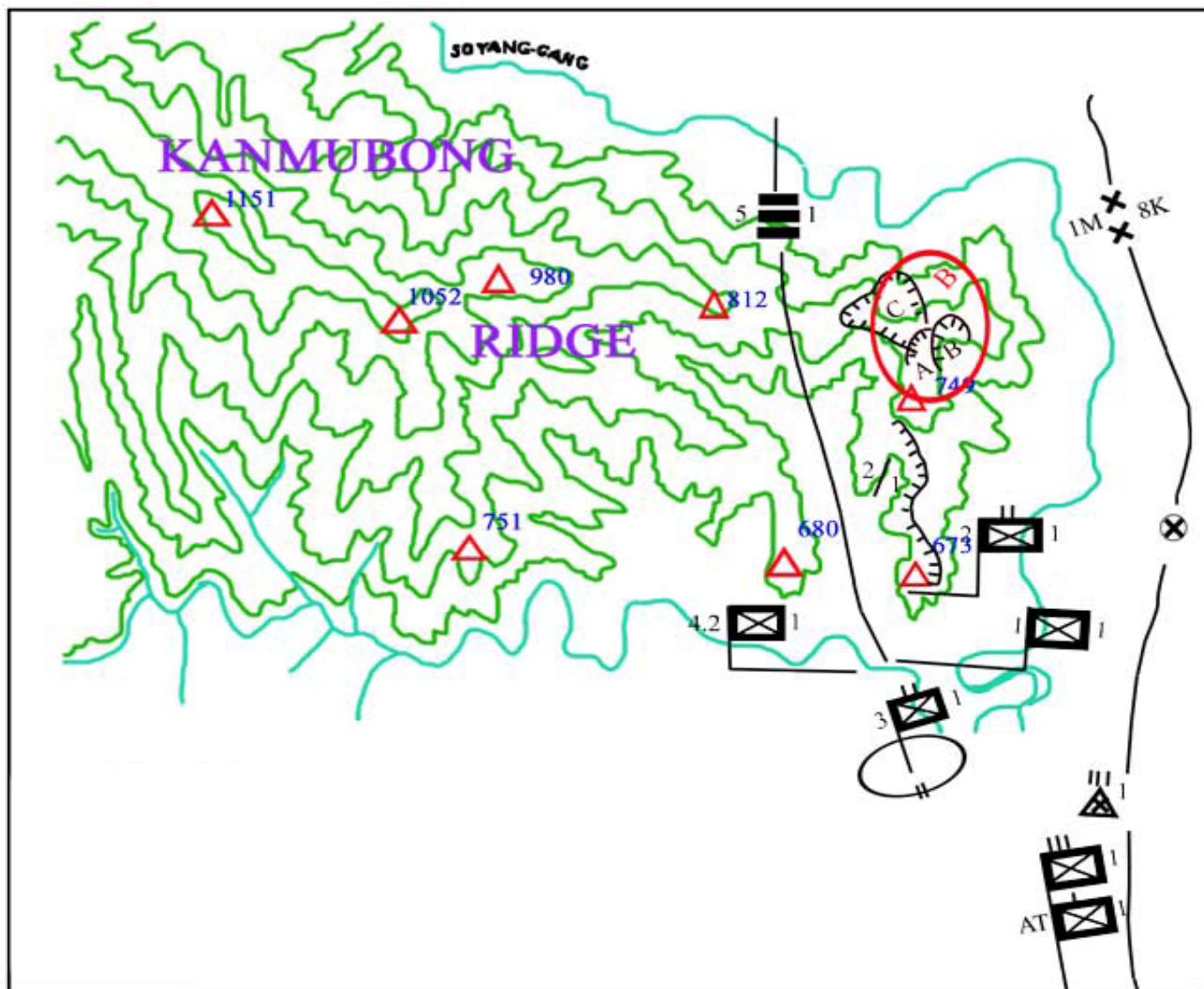
Map 24

Situation as of 2300, September 13, 1951



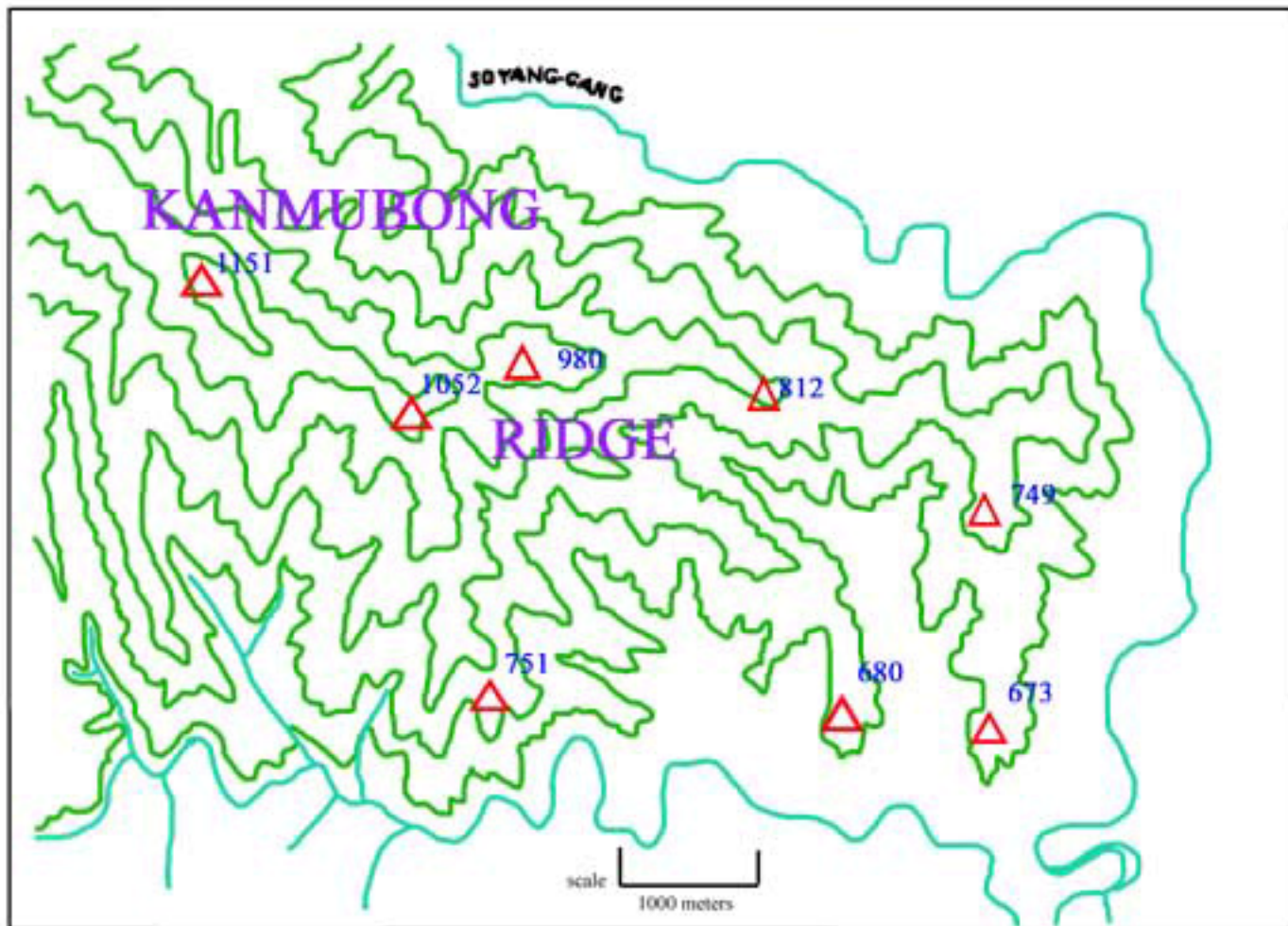
Map 25

Situation 14-15 September

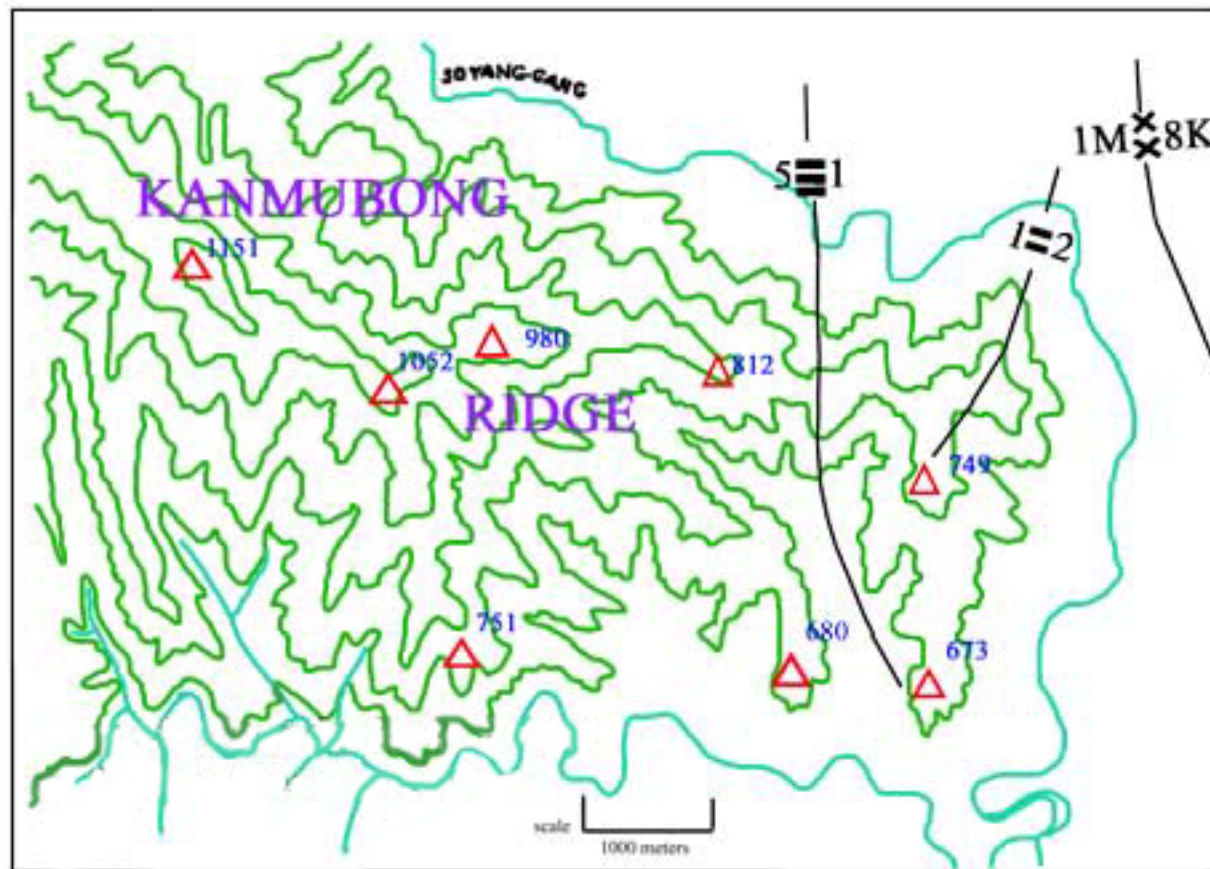


Map 26

Situation as of 2400, September 16



Map 27
Kanmubong Ridge



Map 28

Boundaries in Sector of 1st Marines, September 17-18



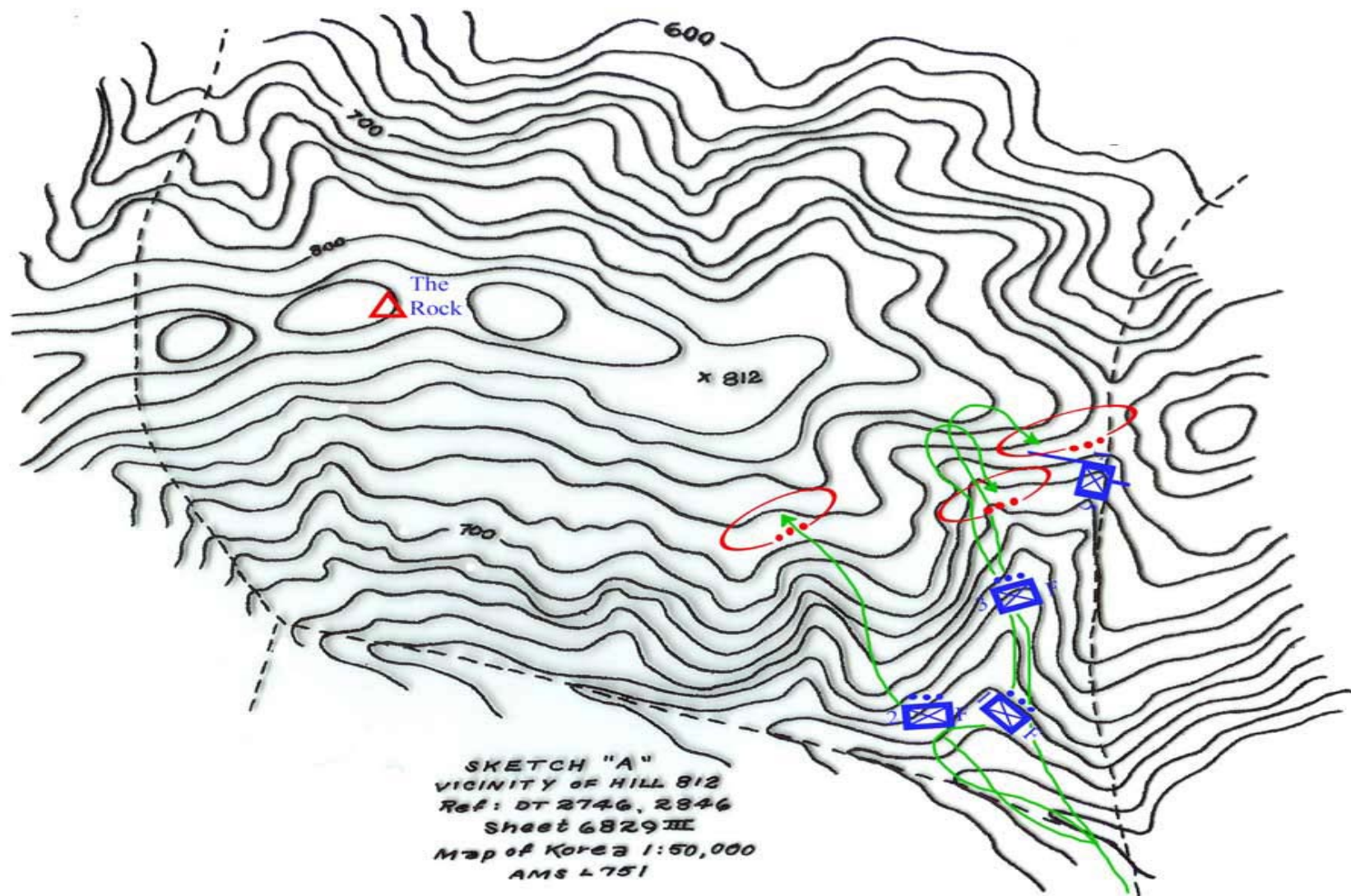
Map 29

Division Objectives for Kanmubong Ridge



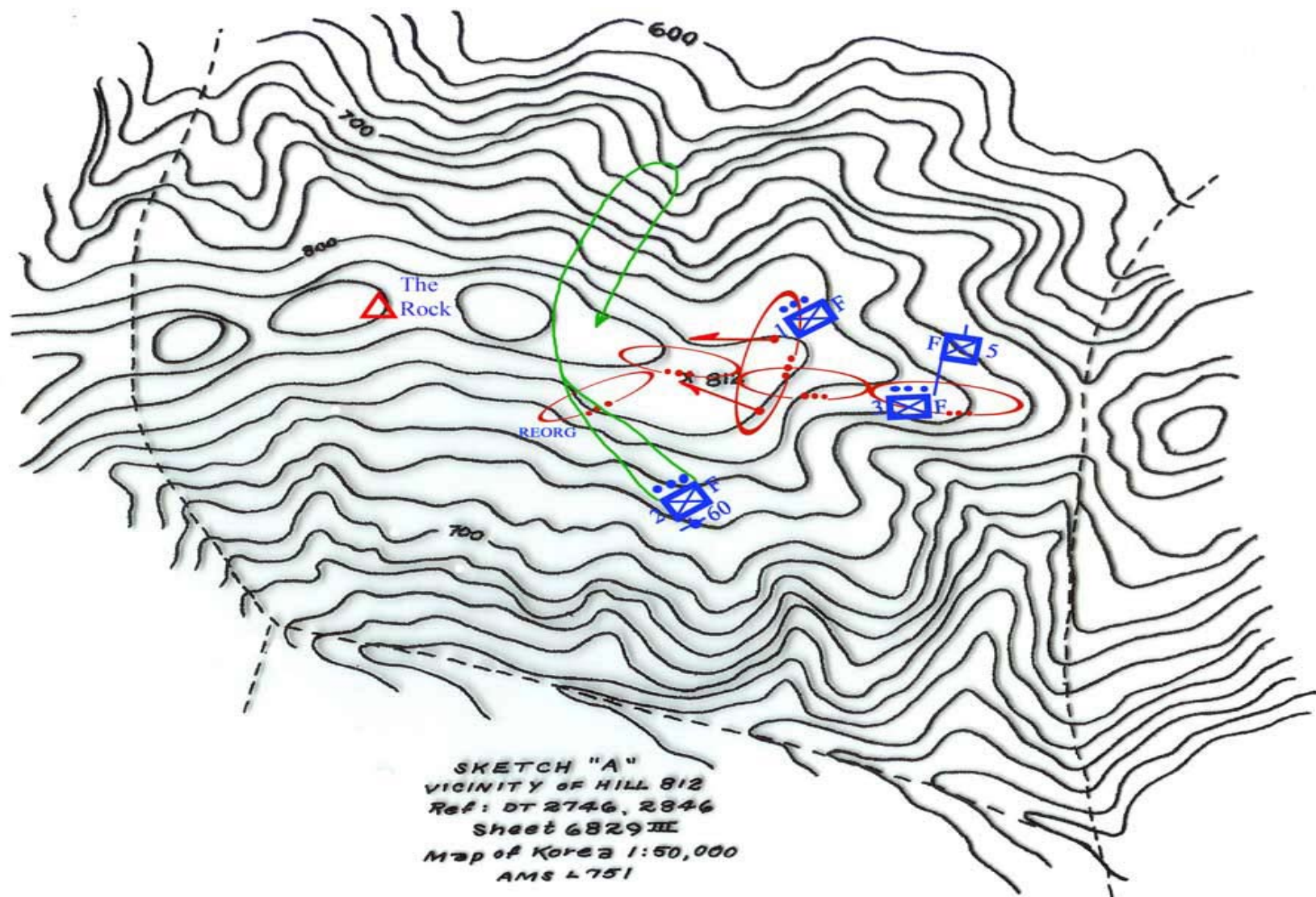
Map 30

Regimental and Division Objectives in Sector of 5th Marines



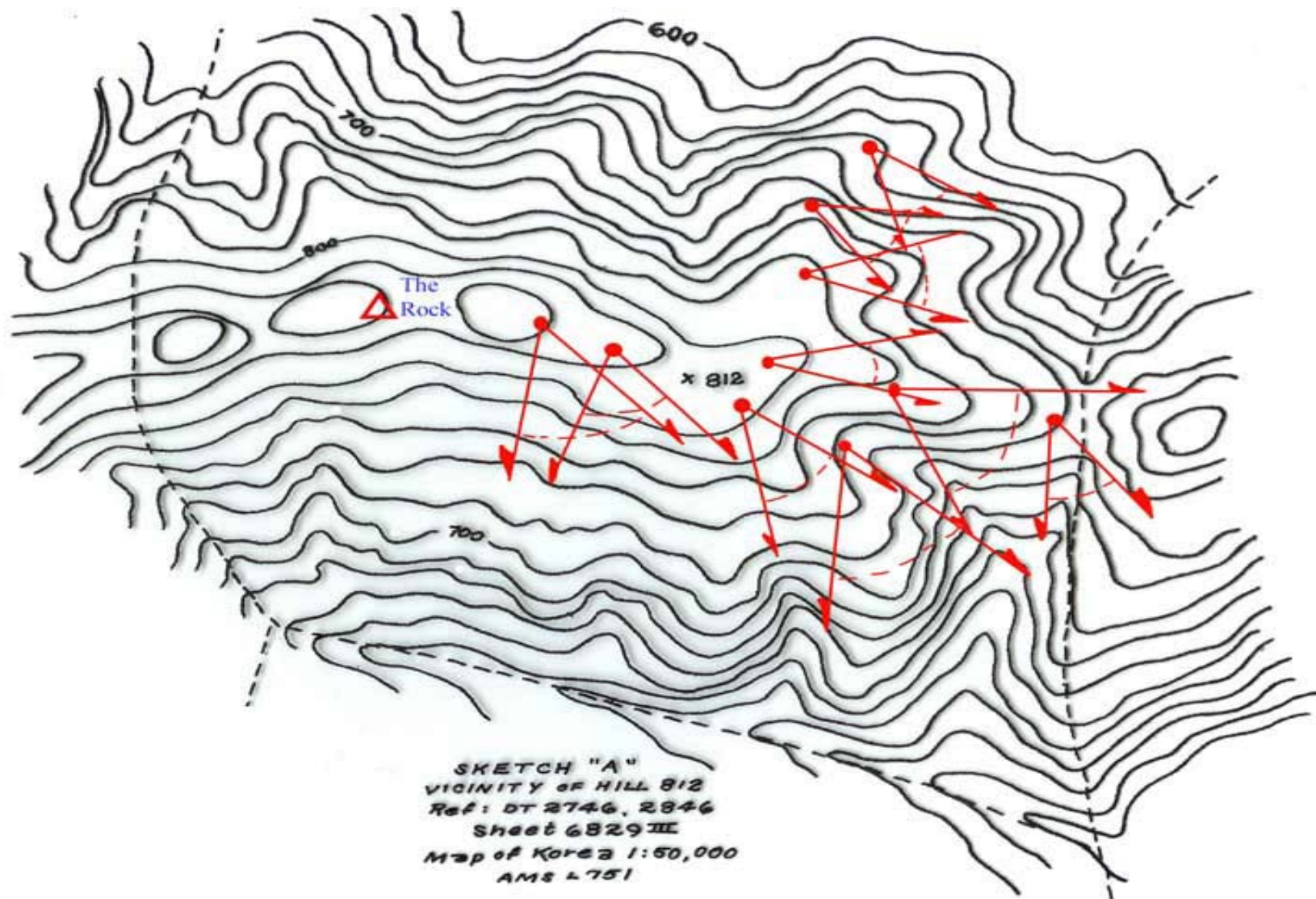
Map 31

Fox Co's Attack and Final Defenses, September 16



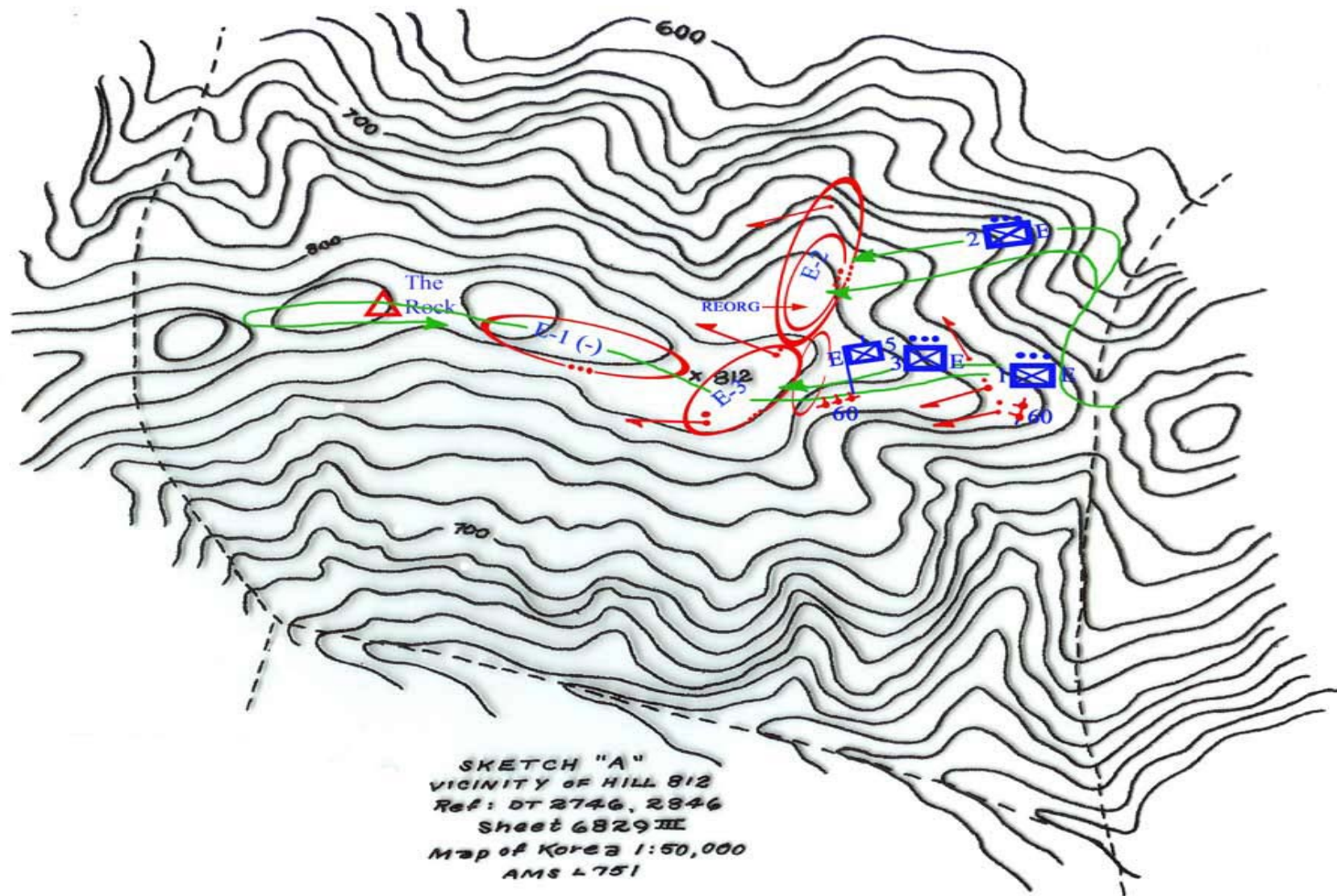
Map 32

Fox Co's Attack and Final Defenses, September 17



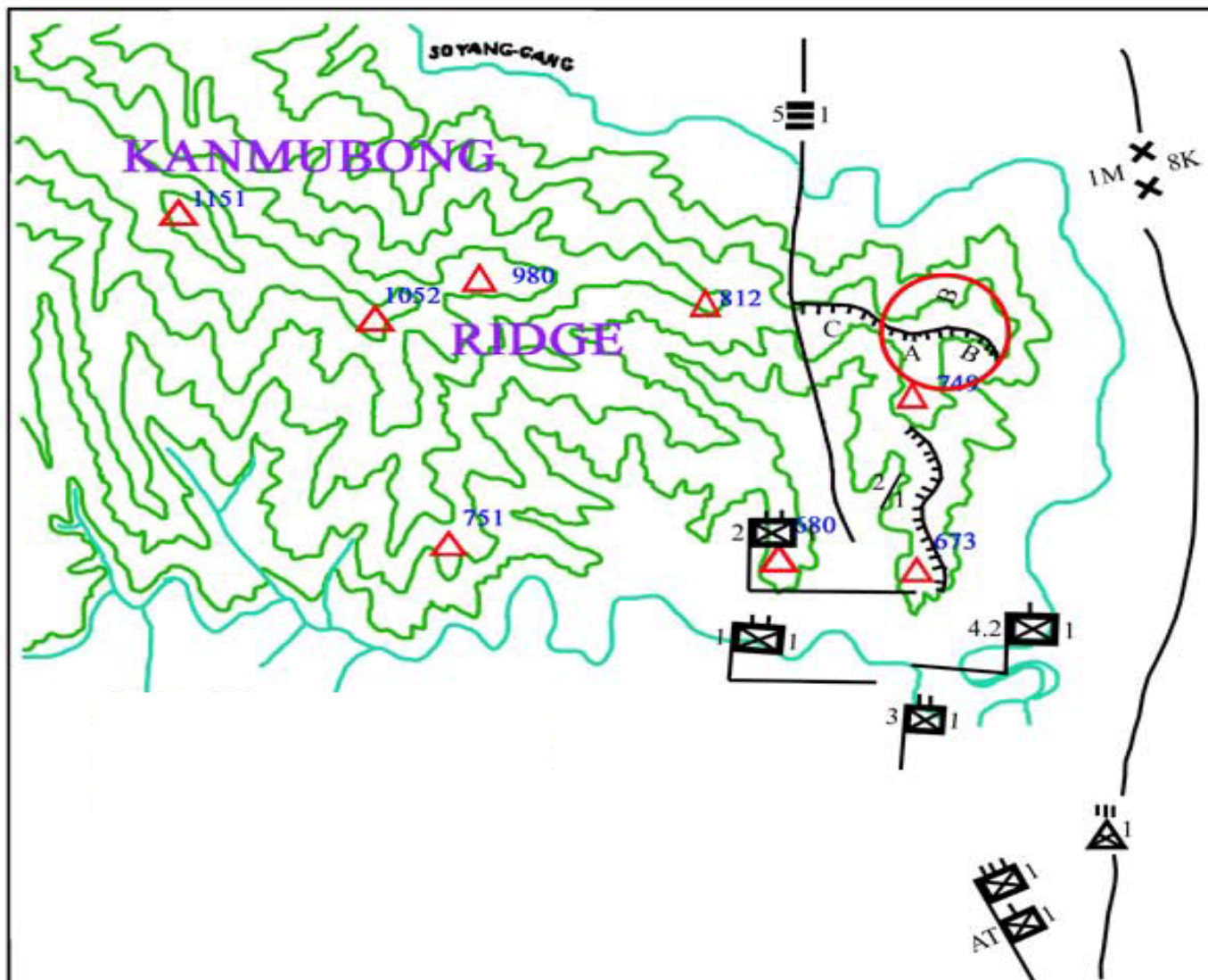
Map 33

Enemy Fields of Fire on Hill 812



Map 34

Easy Co's Attack and Final Positions, September 17



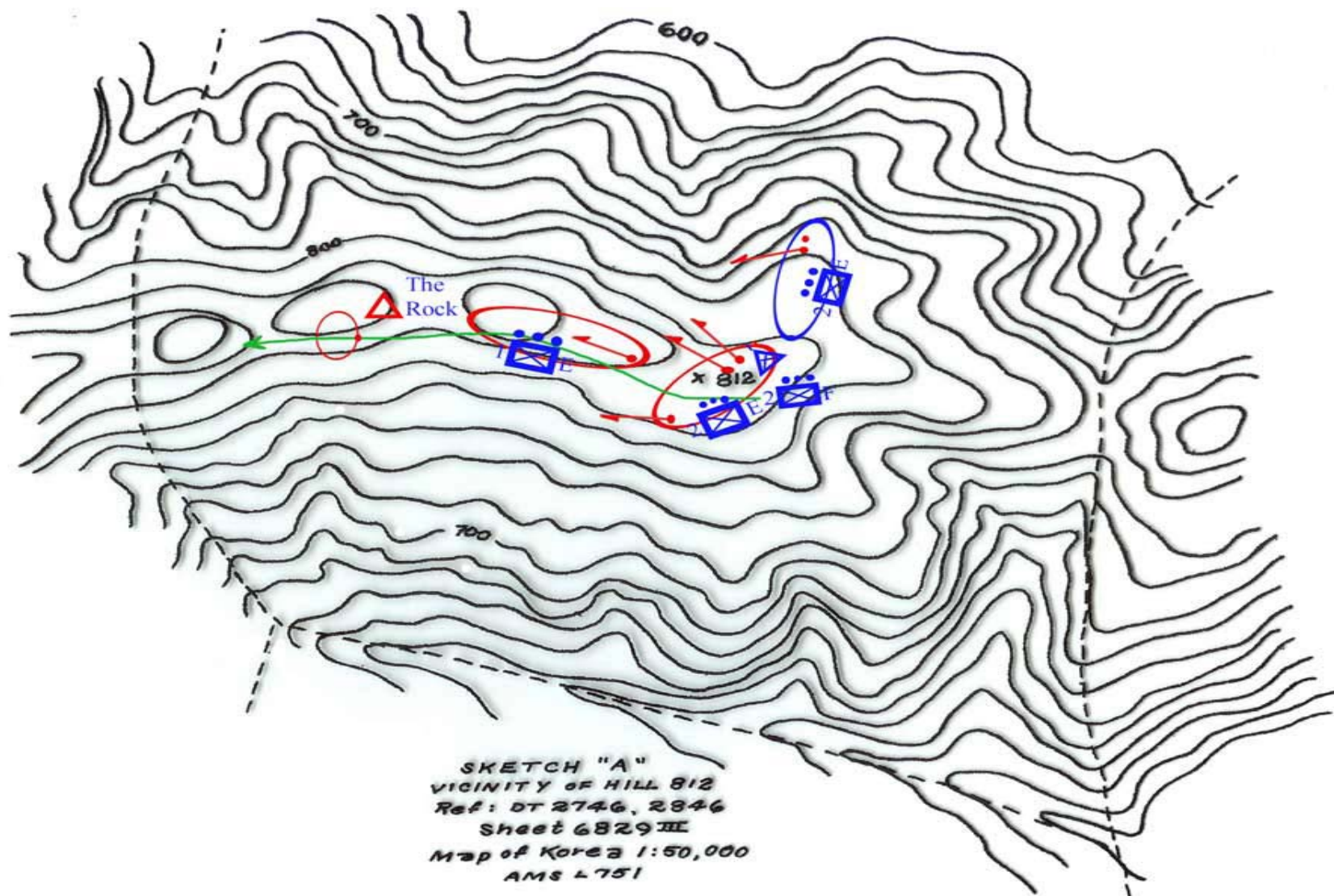
Map 35

Situation September 18, Sector of 1st Marines



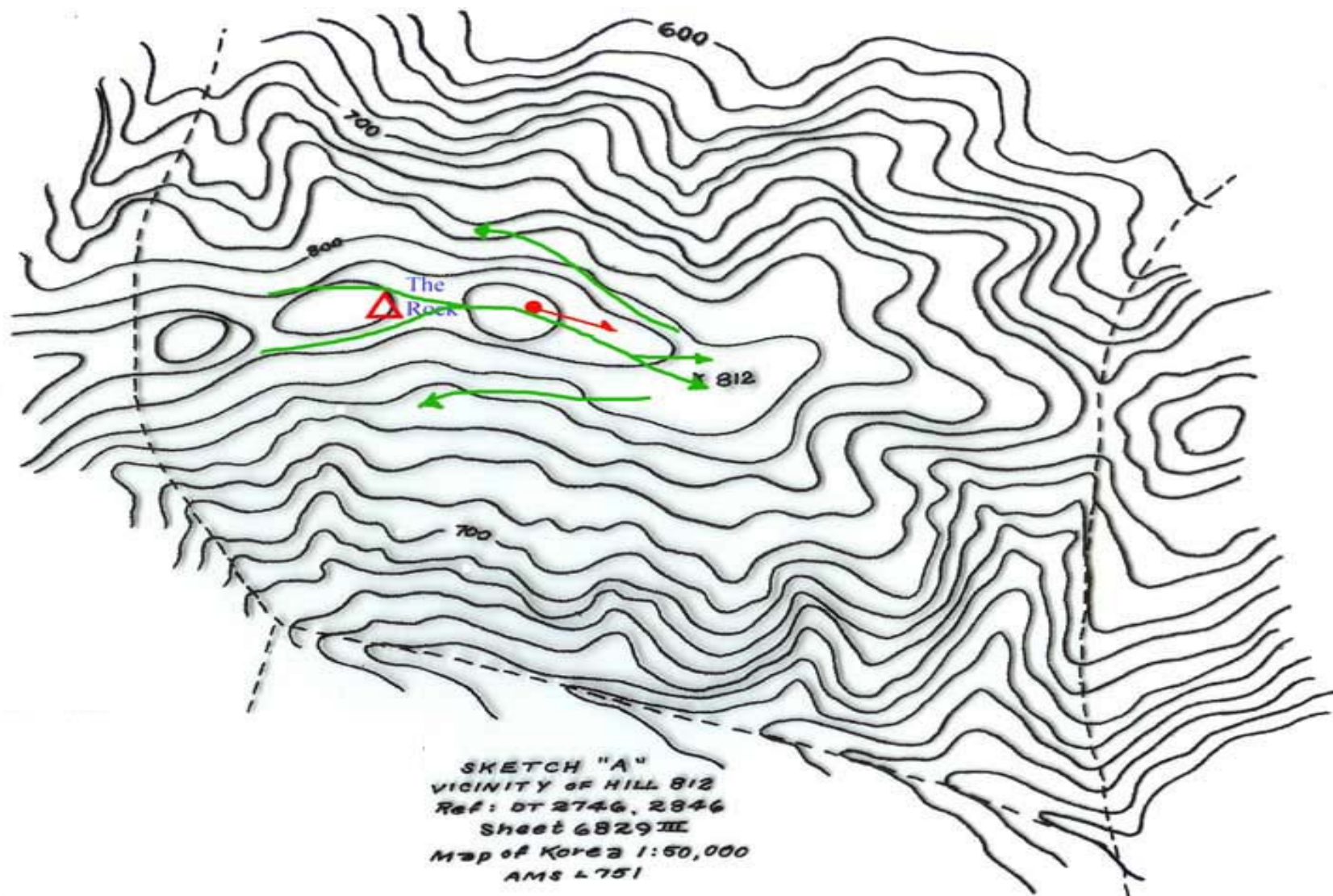
Map 36

2/5's Defensive Positions, September 17-20



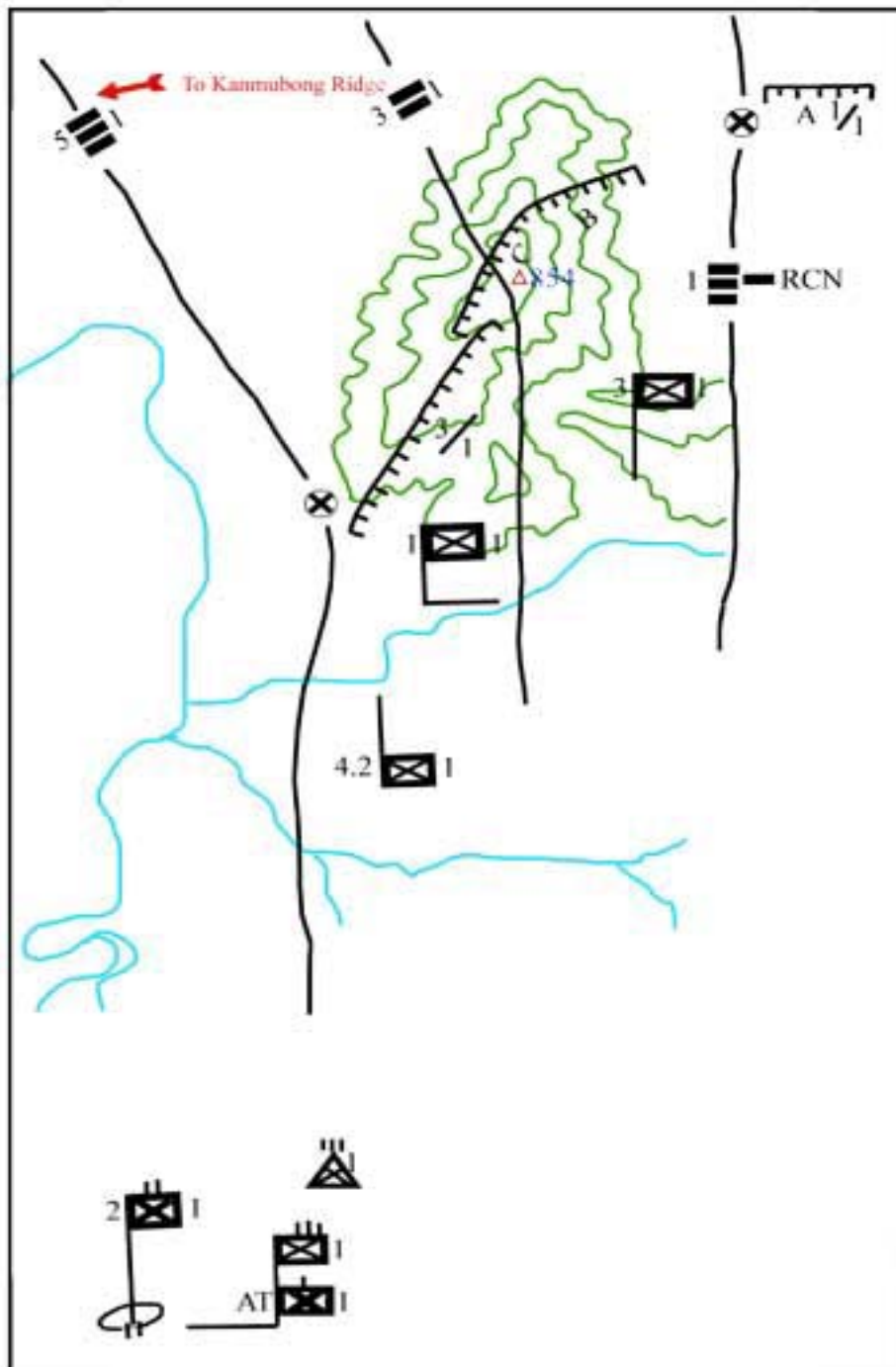
Map 37

Easy Co's Defenses and Fox Co's Counterattack, September 20



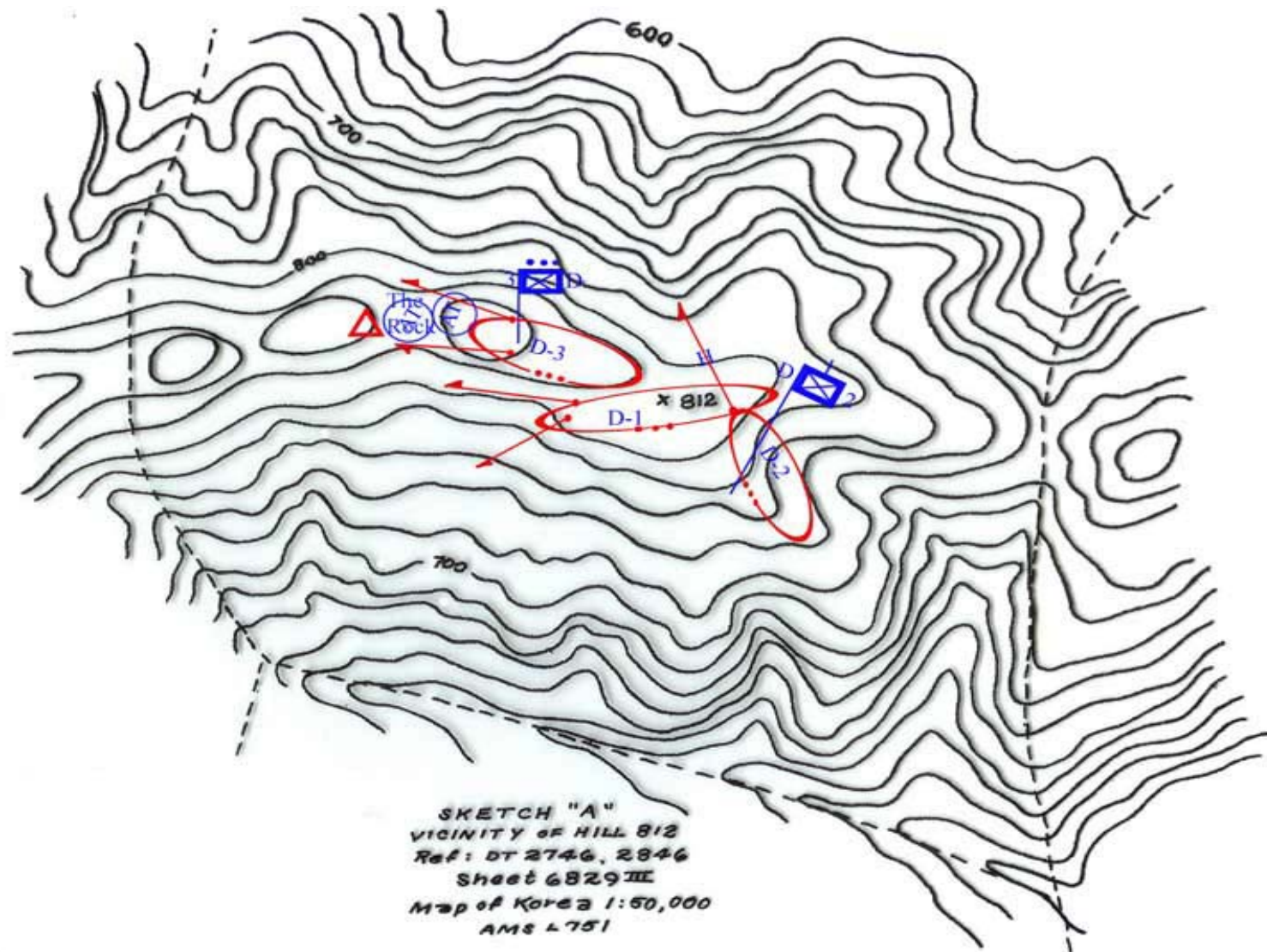
Map 38

Enemy Routes of Approach and Withdrawal, September 20



Map 39

Hill 854, September 18-20



Map 40

Dog Co's Positions, 20-30 September, Attached to 3/5

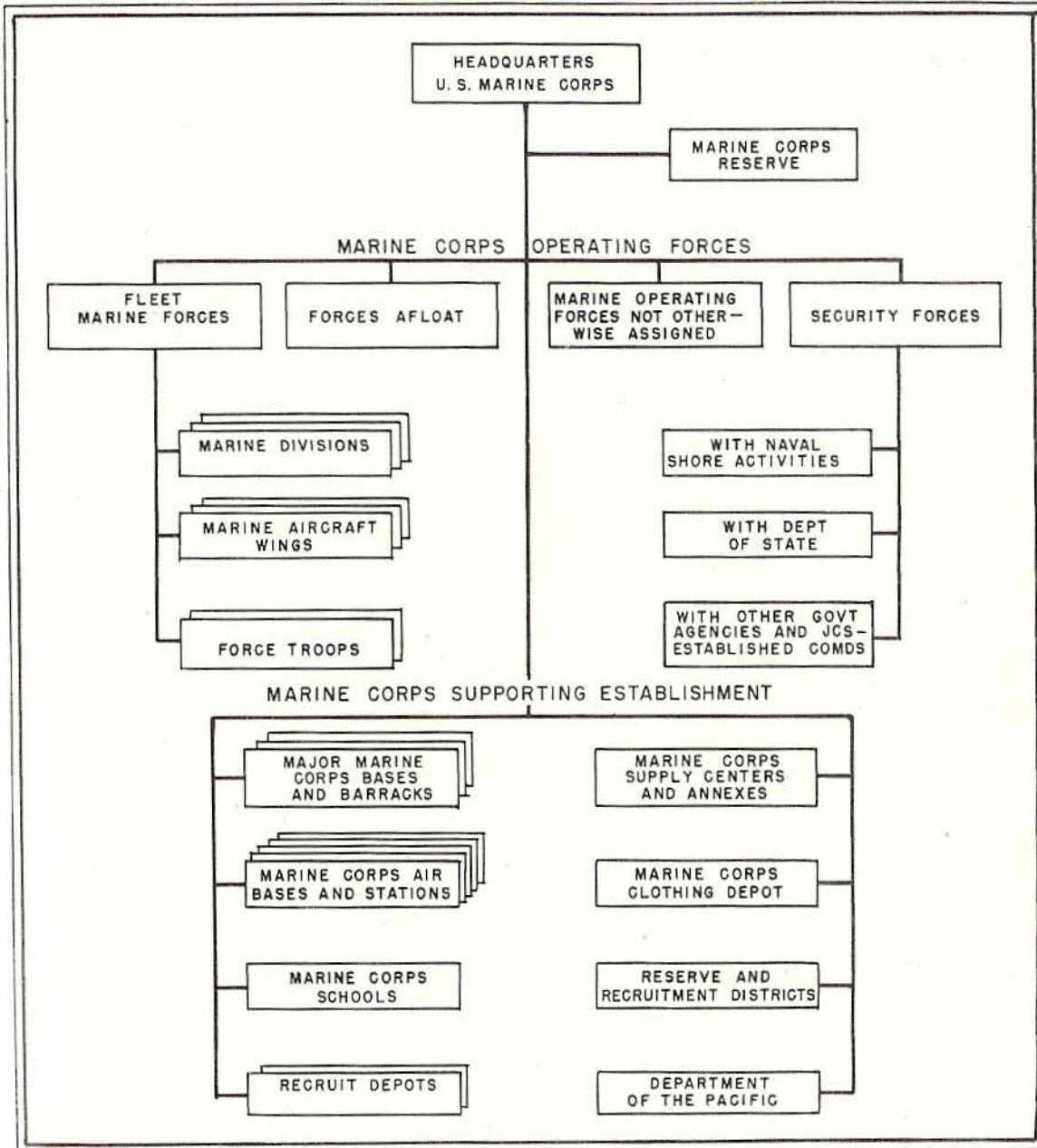
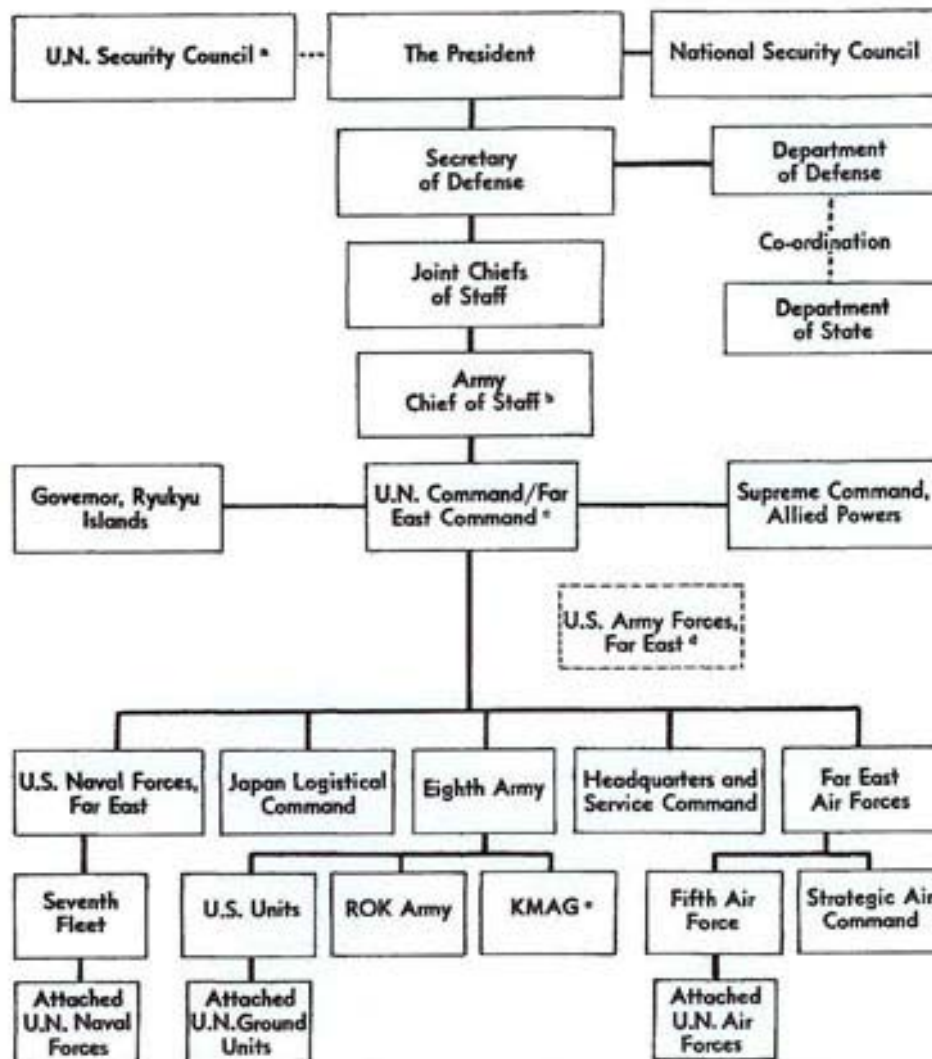


Figure 10
Organization of the Marine Corps



* The U.N. Security Council had no command authority, but did receive biweekly reports from the U.N. commander.

^ The Army Chief of Staff acted as executive agent for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

^ The UNC/FEC exercised operational control only over the air and naval forces under its command.

^ Although Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces, Far East, had not been inactivated, it did not become operational until 1 October 1952.

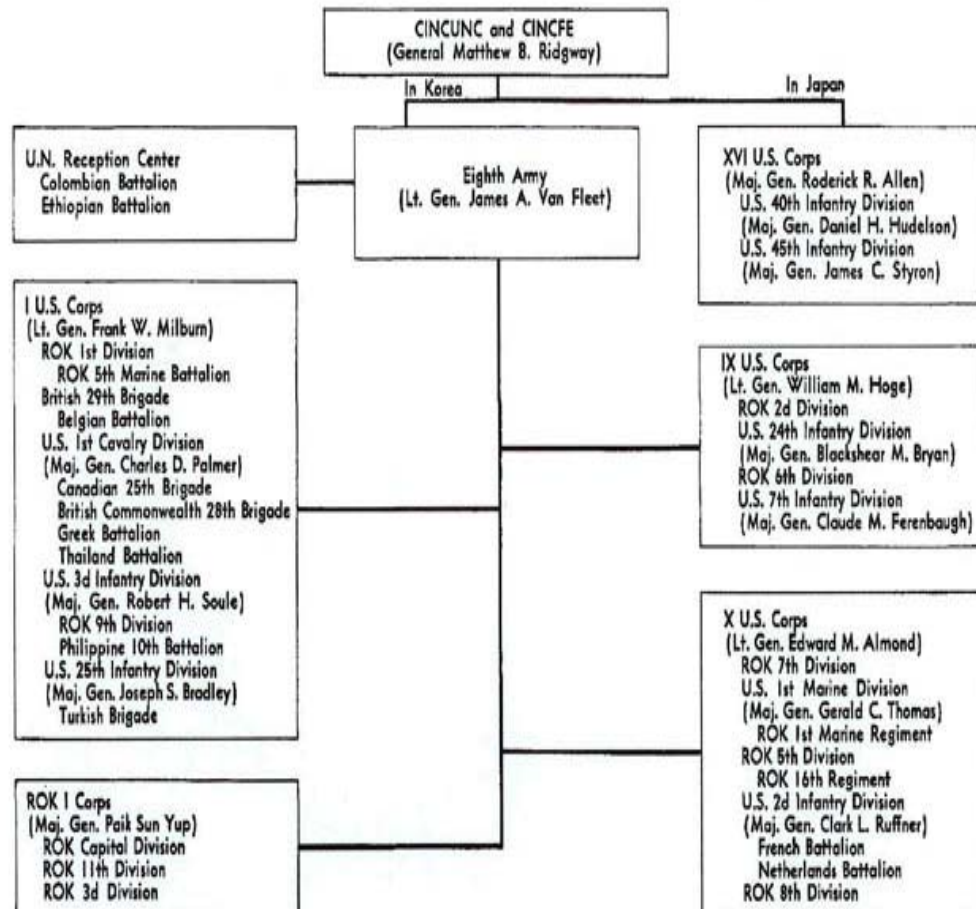
^ The Military Advisory Group for Korea was assigned to Eighth Army command. It continued to discharge its mission of assisting the ROK Army and provided liaison between the Eighth Army and the ROK Army.

Figure 11

Channels of Command, July 1951

Source: Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*

—U.N. COMMAND/FAR EAST COMMAND, MAJOR GROUND FORCES, 1 JULY 1951



Source: Hq Eighth Army, Command Report, ACoS, G-3, bl. 4, pt. 1, 1 Jul 51; DOD General Officers Assignment List, 1 Jul 51, in OCMH files.

Figure 12

Source: Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*

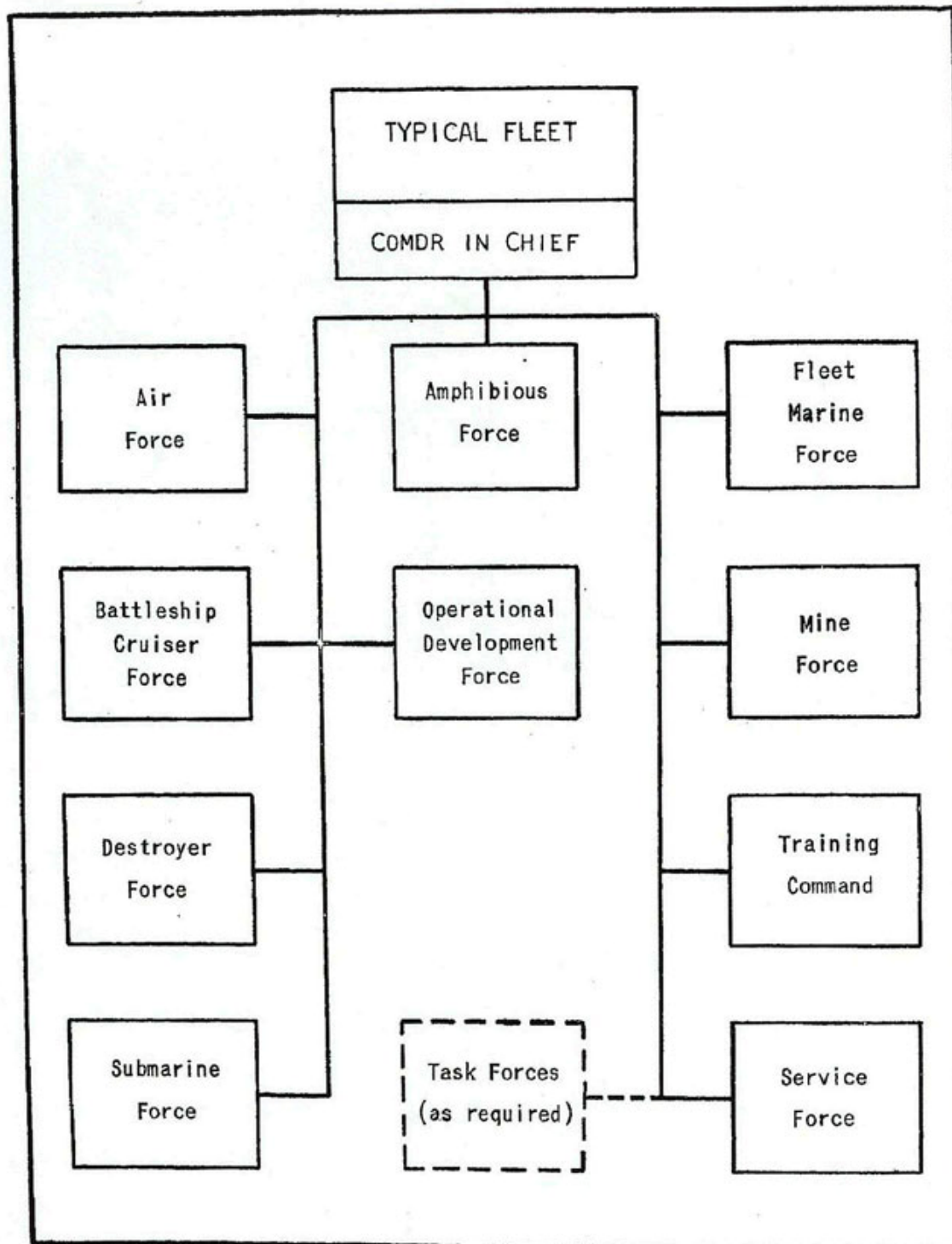
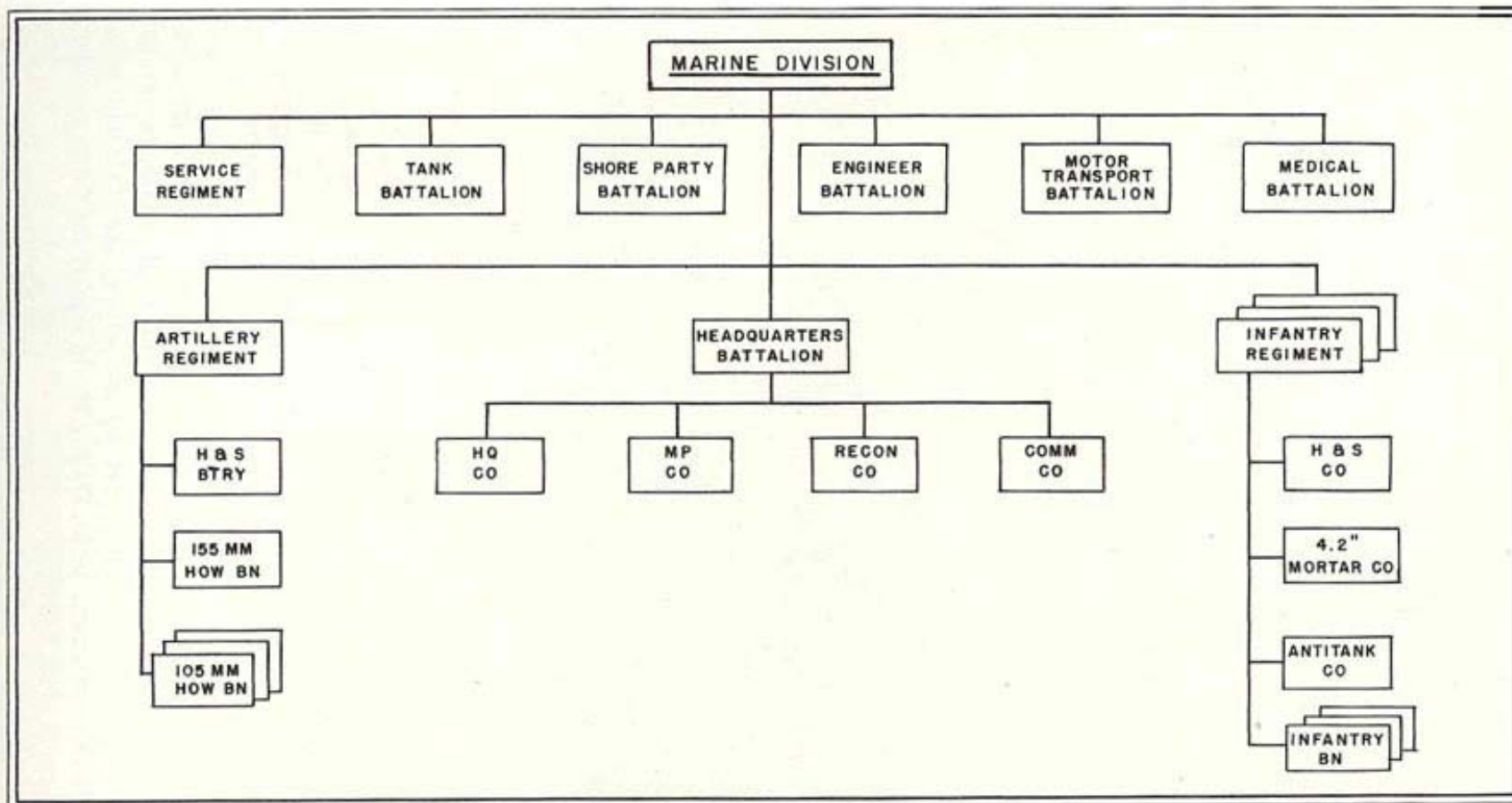


Figure 13

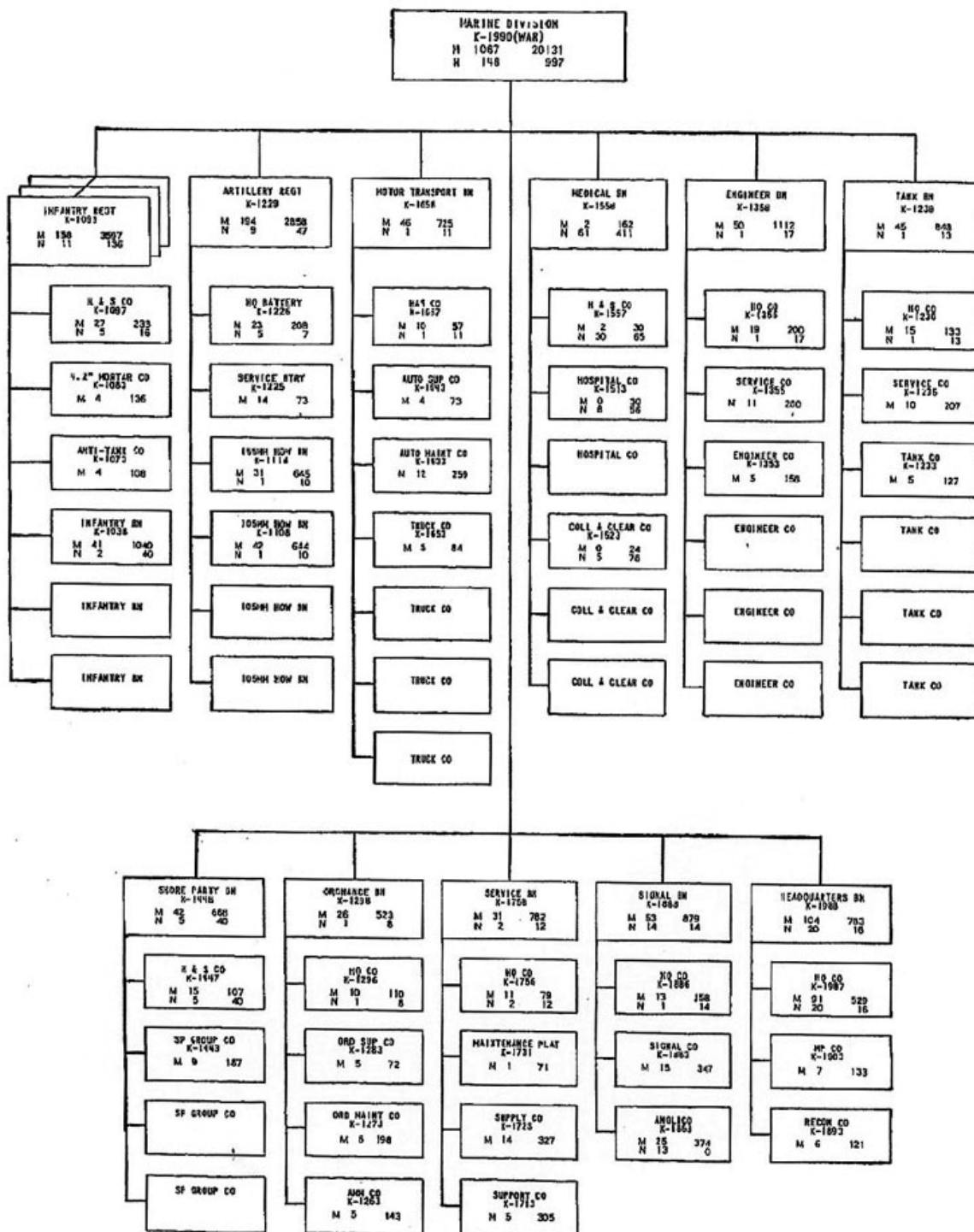
Source: U. S. Marine Corps, Reference Data: Amphibious Operations, NAVMC-1048



Organization of the Marine Division, the basic ground fighting unit of the Corps.

Figure 15

Source: Thomas, Heint, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*. Used by Permission.



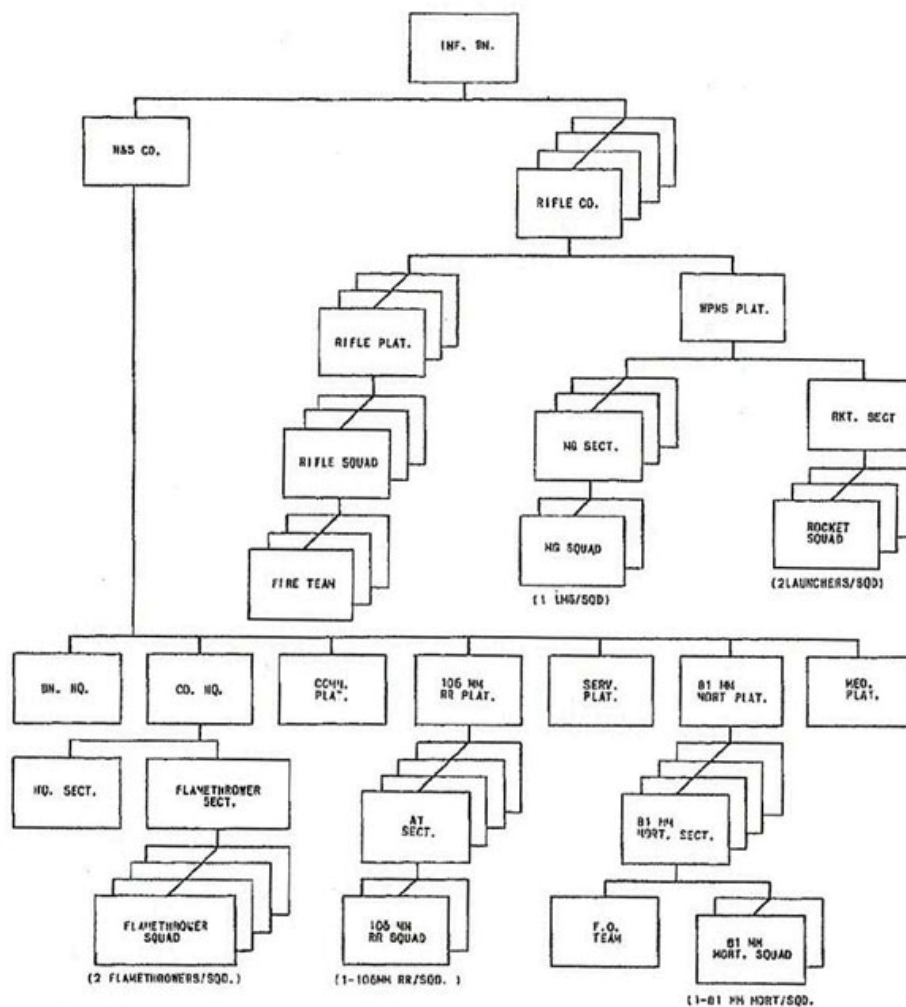
—Marine Division (War).

Figure 16

Source: U. S. Marine Corps, Reference Data: Amphibious Operations, NAVMC-1048

NOTE TO STUDENT:

This diagram is incomplete as it omits most of the headquarters elements of the various subordinate units.



—Block diagram of Provisional-series Infantry Battalion.

Figure 17

Source: U. S. Marine Corps, Reference Data: Amphibious Operations, NAVMC-1048

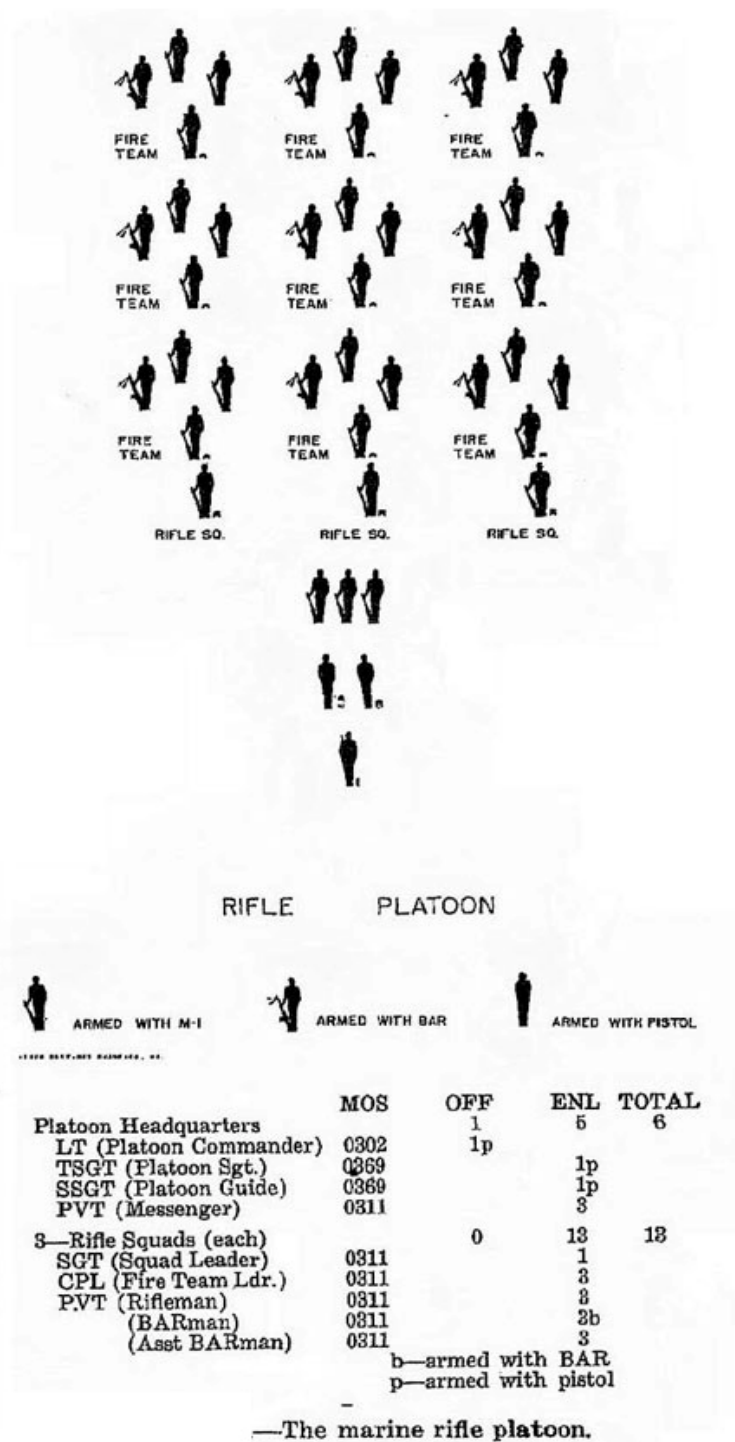
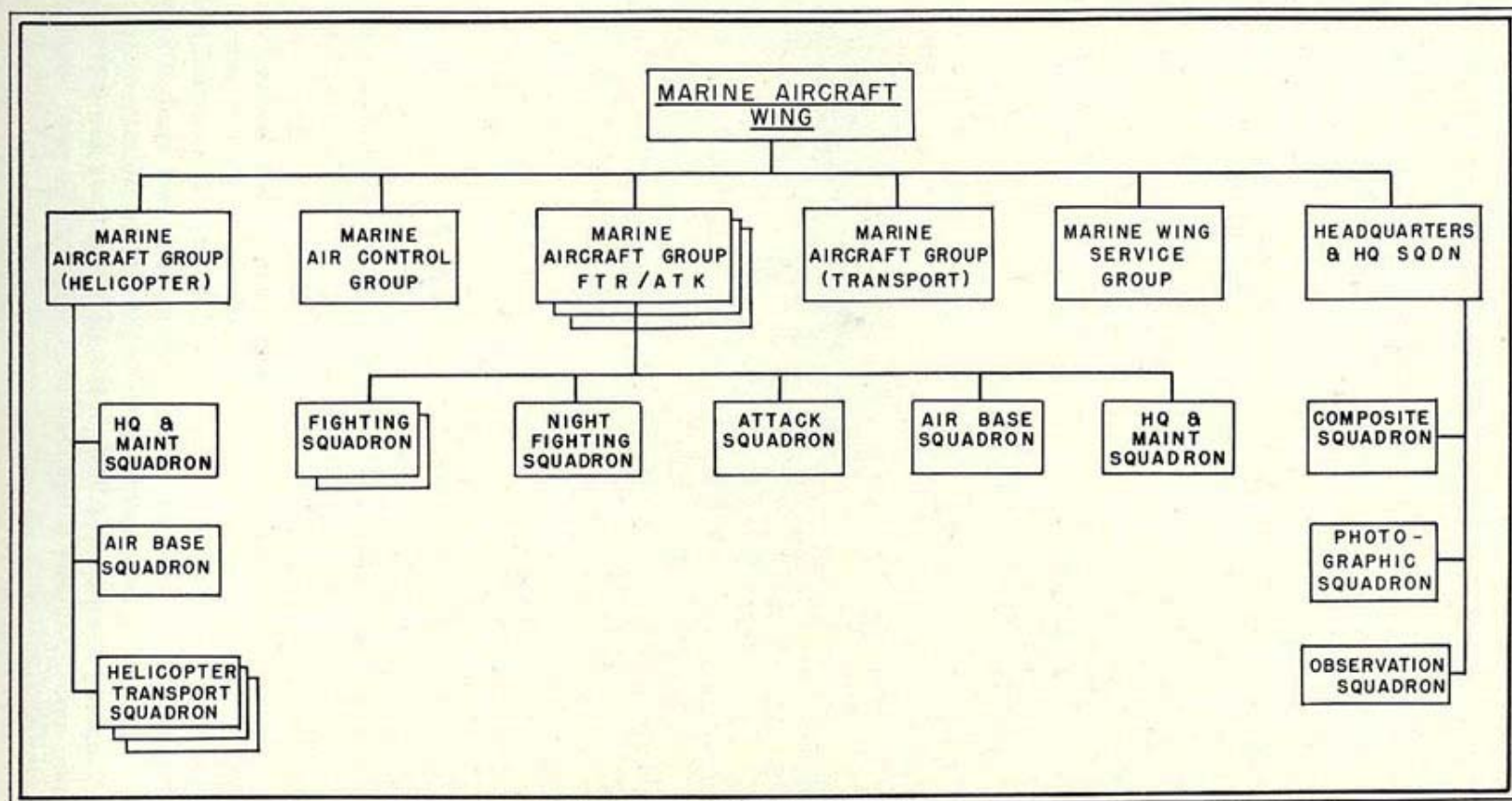


Figure 18

Source: Leatherneck Association, "Guidebook for Marines, 1950"



Organization of a typical Marine Aircraft Wing. Note that the wing organization is flexible rather than fixed.

Figure 19

Source: Thomas, Heintz, and Ageton, *Marine Officer's Guide*. Used by Permission.

Figure 20. Strength, Losses, and Replacements in 1 Mar Div—1 June to 15 October 1951¹

Authorized Strength	25,710
Average Strength (as a percentage of authorized strength)	96
Battle casualties	4,241
Nonbattle casualties	5,549
Casualties returned to duty	6,706
Rotation Losses	11,637
Replacements	13,097

¹ Based on the Table from Allen Millett, *Many a Strife*, 306.

1st Marine Division (Reinf) casualties during the period
(Does not include figures for attached Korean Marines)

Month	KIA	WIA	MIA
May	83	731	-
June	183	1973	1
July	14	158	8
August	3	57	-
September	209	1610	3
October	43	262	2
November	28	379	-
December	15	162	6
Totals for period	558	5238	18

Strength each month of 1st Marine Division (Reinf) FMF
(Does not include KMC)

Month	U. S. MARINES		U. S. NAVY	
	Officer	Enlisted	Officer	Enlisted
May	1286	24482	152	1023
June	1169	24878	133	970
July	1193	23690	158	1063
August	1302	26788	171	1273
September	1262	23926	145	1101
October	1210	23001	141	976
November	1239	20984	164	1025
December	1240	22832	146	1098

Figure 21

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

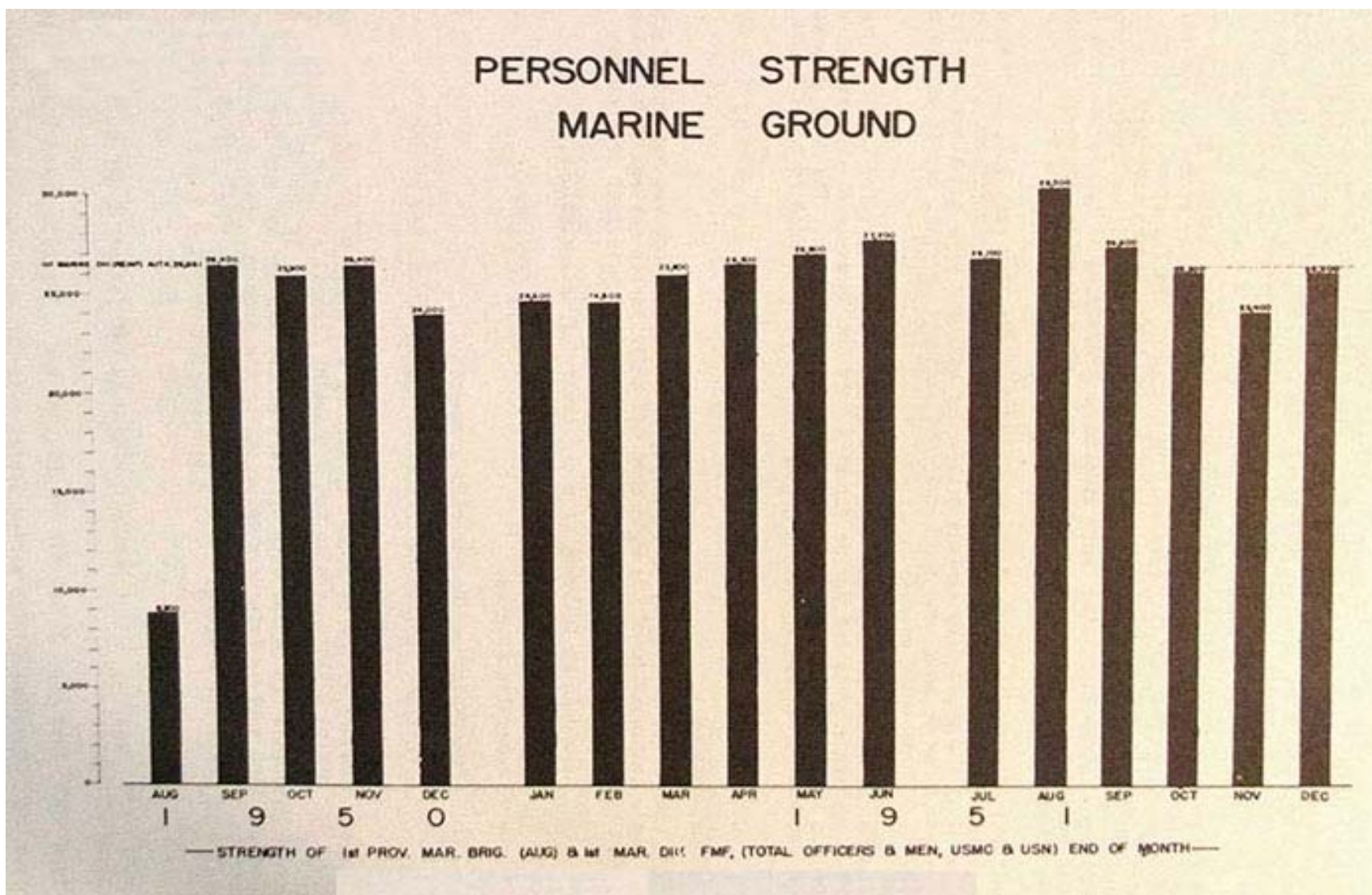


Figure 22

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

—EIGHTH ARMY ESTIMATE OF ENEMY FORCES
1 JULY 1951

Units*	Total Strength	Units*	Total Strength
Chinese Communist Forces.....	248,100	Korean People's Army.....	211,100
12th Army		I Corps	
31st, 34th, 35th Divisions.....	16,100	8th, 19th, 47th Divisions.....	15,800
15th Army		II Corps	
29th, 44th, 45th Divisions.....	14,400	2d, 13th, 27th Divisions.....	18,700
20th Army		III Corps	
58th, 59th, 60th Divisions.....	16,400	1st, 15th, 45th Divisions.....	30,400
26th Army		IV Corps	
76th, 77th, 78th Divisions.....	19,700	4th, 5th, 105th Armored Divi- sions, 26th Brigade.....	29,200
27th Army		V Corps	
79th, 80th, 81st Divisions.....	26,000	6th, 12th, 32d Divisions.....	14,300
38th Army		VI Corps	
112th, 113th, 114th Divisions.....	13,900	9th, 17th Mechanized, 18th, 23d Divisions.....	35,500
39th Army		VII Corps	
115th, 116th, 117th Divisions.....	24,000	3d, 24th, 37th, 46th Divisions, 63d Brigade.....	35,500
40th Army		Other forces.....	31,700
118th, 119th, 120th Divisions.....	18,500		
42d Army			
124th, 125th, 126th Divisions.....	29,000		
47th Army			
140th Division.....	8,500		
60th Army			
179th, 180th, 181st Divisions.....	13,900		
63d Army			
187th, 188th, 189th Divisions.....	13,900		
64th Army			
190th, 191st, 192d Divisions.....	17,700		
65th Army			
193d, 194th, 195th Divisions.....	16,100		

* Besides these units, Eighth Army Intelligence officers suspected but had not as yet confirmed the presence of six other Chinese armies and two-thirds of a seventh.

Source: Eighth Army G-2 Estimate of Enemy Strength and Locations, 1 Jul 51; Eighth Army G-2 OB Br, CCF Army Histories, 1 Dec 64. Both in ACSI Doc Library DA.

Figure 23

Source: Walter Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*

Casualties inflicted upon the enemy by 1st Marine Division (Reinf) operations during the period:¹

Estimated enemy casualties			
<u>Month</u>	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>POW</u>
May	5407	8686	593
June	5197	5559	760
July	409	237	61
August	347	233	14
September	4773	4707	557
October	3086	4927	471
November	2136	2235	104
December	<u>1187</u>	<u>1480</u>	<u>56</u>
Totals	22542	28064	2616

Figure 24

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

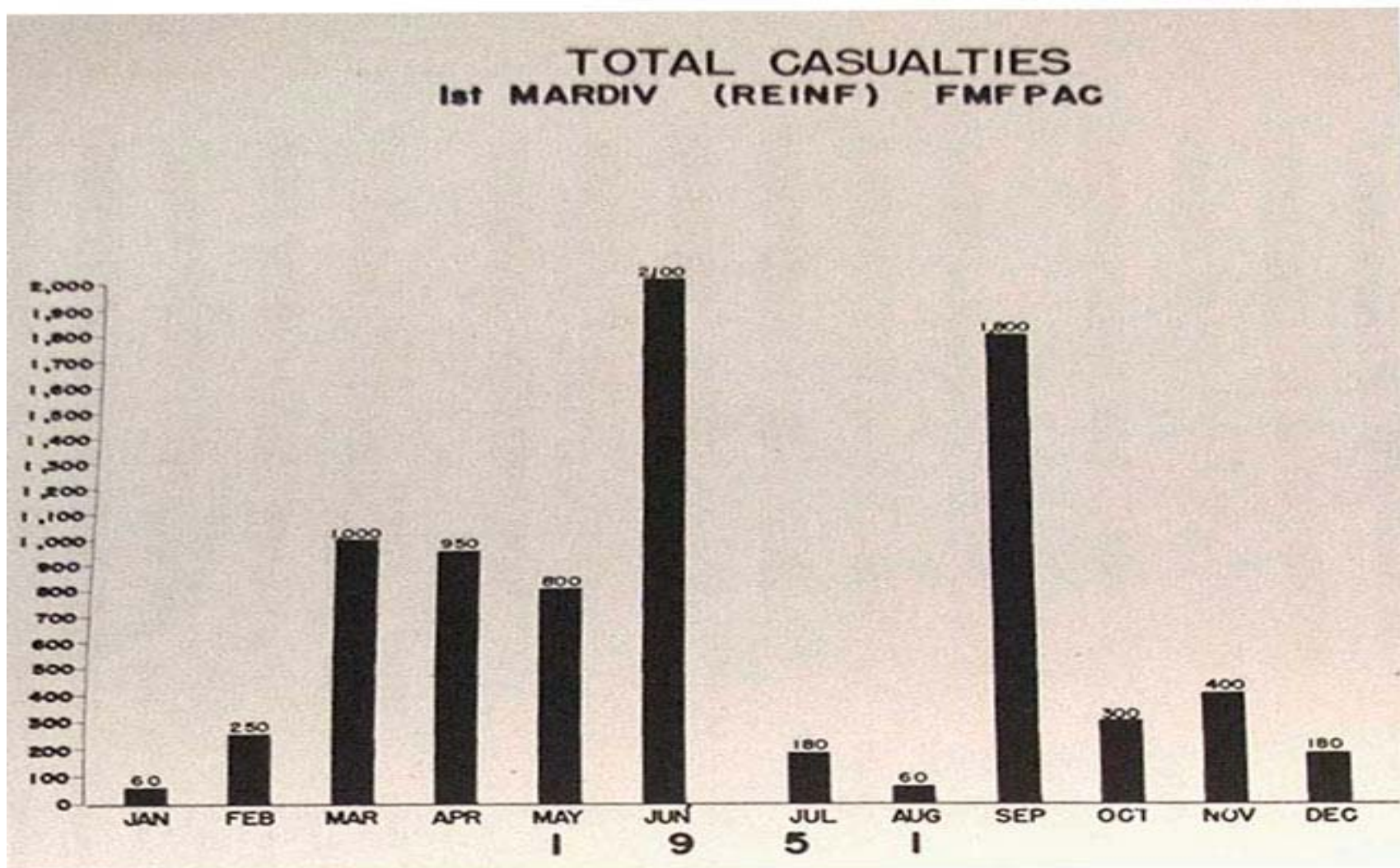


Figure 25

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



A Marine waves a helicopter in,
September, 1951.

Figure 26

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



Figure 27

A Bunker on Hill 812

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



Figure 28

Helicopter Med-Evac

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



Figure 29

A View From 749

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



Figure 30

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



Figure 31

Hill 854

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

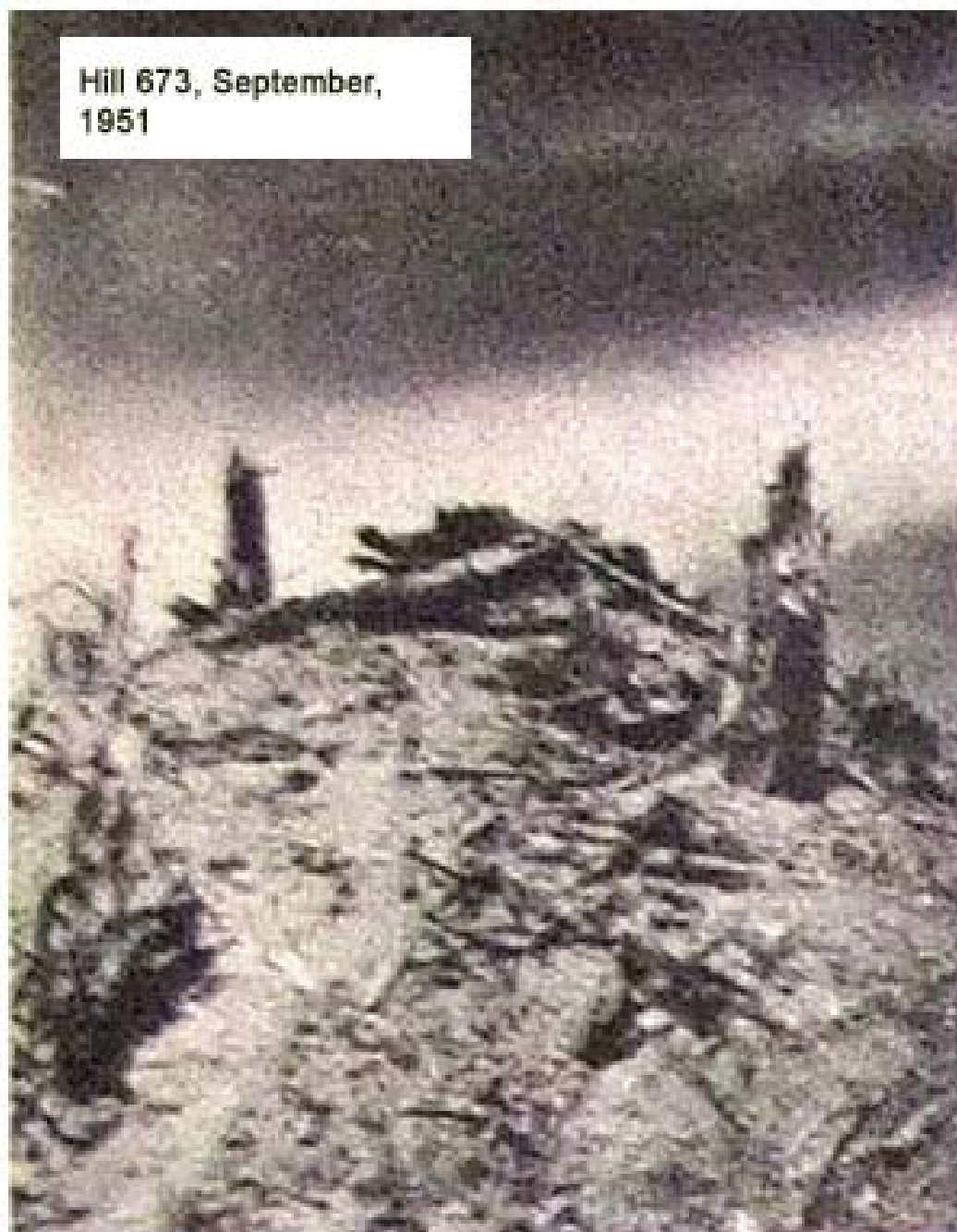


Figure 32

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"



Figure 33

Offensive to Hill 812

Source: U. S. Pacific Fleet, "Third Interim Evaluation Report"

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